



THE DISABILITY VOTE MATTERS!

EXERCISING YOUR RIGHT TO VOTE

Despite laws requiring polling locations that are both physically accessible and allow a voter to cast a private ballot without assistance, many locations still fall short in meeting these goals. In fact, Pennsylvania has over 1,500 physically inaccessible polling places. For more information about this fundamental right see our publication: *Fact Sheet: Voting by People with Disabilities: Ensuring Participation for All Citizens*.

This publication seeks to provide information about how you can cast your ballot in Pennsylvania, even if your polling place is not accessible.

Casting your Ballot:

Before an election, a voter can contact your County Board of Elections to determine if a voting site is accessible. You can find this information on the Pennsylvania Department of State website.

If voting is inaccessible or you need assistance due to blindness, disability, or inability to read or write, you are entitled to assistance. Assistance may be given by anyone of your choice other than:

- a Judge of Elections

- the voter's union representative or employer

To qualify your voter registration card should note the need for assistance or you must fill out a "Declaration of Need of Assistance" form and submit it to the County Board of Elections. This should be provided by a poll worker if requested and will ask for:

- Name and address of person requesting assistance
- Reason for need of assistance
- Name and address of person rendering assistance

This record is returned to the County Board of Elections and may be examined only upon the written order of a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas.

Also, if you have a disability or you are 65 or older, then you can cast either:

- An Absentee Ballot;
- An Alternative Ballot (only available for voters registered at locations deemed inaccessible by the county board of elections)

You must submit your application to obtain an absentee ballot on the Tuesday before the election. Your County Board of Elections must receive your absentee ballot by 5:00 p.m. on the Friday before the election for it to be counted.

If you are a person with a permanent disability, you may apply for a permanent absentee ballot. This form requires obtaining certification of an attending physician that you are permanently disabled, and physically unable to attend the polls or operate a machine. If granted permanent absentee status you will be mailed an application for each election as long as you are eligible to vote. Every four years you must submit a written statement asserting continuing disability but does not require a new physician certificate.

An alternative ballot is available if you have a disability or are at least 65 years of age and have been assigned a polling place deemed inaccessible by the County Board of Elections. You have this right regardless of if you appear at the polling place. Upon filling out this ballot it can be delivered to the County Board of Elections in person, by an authorized representative, or through the U.S. Mail. The deadline to apply for an Alternative Ballot is 5 p.m. the Tuesday before Election Day. In cases of an emergency you can submit an Emergency Application for Alternative ballot which must be received by 8 p.m. on Election Day. Completed alternative ballots must be received by 8 p.m. on Election Day.

Application for Absentee and Alternative ballots can be made at your County Election Office. For help locating your county office, call 1-877-VOTES-PA (1-877-868-3772) or go to www.VotesPa.com.

Return your absentee ballot to the County Election Office in person or by U.S. Mail. An Alternative Ballot may be returned by another adult with written permission of the voter.

Creating Accessible Polling Locations:

If your polling place is inaccessible, after Election Day work with your County Election Office to make all polling places accessible. Help them by locating some alternate accessible locations. Write to your county officials and also to:

Pedro A. Cortés, Secretary of the Department of State
302 North Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

If that does not work, please contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania (DRP).

Contact Information

If you need more information or need help, please contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania (DRP) at 800-692-7443 (voice) or 877-375-7139 (TDD). The email address is: intake@disabilityrightspa.org.

If you encounter any problems at your polling place on Election Day, call DRP's Election Day hotline at 717-839-5227 or email us at electionday@disabilityrightspa.org between 7am and 8pm on Election Day. After Election Day, contact DRP at 800-692-7443 (voice) or 877-375-7139 (TDD) or intake@disabilityrightspa.org.

The mission of Disability Rights Pennsylvania is to advance, protect, and advocate for the human, civil, and legal rights of Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Due to our limited resources, Disability Rights Pennsylvania cannot provide individual services to every person with advocacy and legal issues. Disability Rights Pennsylvania prioritizes cases that have the potential to result in widespread, systemic changes to benefit persons with disabilities. While we cannot provide assistance to everyone, we do seek to provide every individual with information and referral options.

IMPORTANT: This publication is for general informational purposes only. This publication is not intended, nor should be construed, to create an attorney-client relationship between Disability Rights Pennsylvania and any person. Nothing in this publication should be considered to be legal advice.

PLEASE NOTE: For information in alternative formats or a language other than English, contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania at 800-692-7443 Ext. 400, TDD: 877-375-7139 or intake@disabilityrightspa.org.