



# **The Power of VOTING!**

## **Introduction**

If you are 18 years old and a citizen of the United States, you have a right to vote! Voting is an easy and important way to affect your local community, state, and country. Going to your local polling place (place where you vote) or filling out a ballot at home can have a big impact on you and your future. This guide will give you information on how to vote. It will also give you resources to help you find more information.

## **Laws That Make Voting Accessible**

### **American's with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

The U.S. Congress passed the American's with Disability Act (ADA) in 1990. This law says that buildings must allow everyone to enter and get around inside. Policies must include people with disabilities. Public sites and programs have to be available to all people. People with many different disabilities are covered by this law.

Title II of this law is about the government. It says that all elections and polling places have to be accessible.

### **Help America Vote Act of 2002**

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) was passed by Congress in 2002. This law is focused on voting and accessibility. This law says that people with disabilities can vote in private and on their own. It gives them the same right as other voters. Every state must have a way for people with disabilities to get information. This same site is also a place where people can report violations (times when the law is not followed).



## **Activities**

- Contact the Secretary of State. This can be about accessibility, reporting problems, or volunteering.

## **Resources**

- Federal Election Commission: <http://www.fec.gov/>
- U.S. Department of Justice: <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/hava/hava.html>
- ADA Technical Assistance: <http://www.ada.gov/taprogram.htm>
- American Association of People with Disabilities: <http://www.aapd-dc.org/dvpmain/elreform/havadispro.html>

## **Registering to Vote**

You have to register before you can vote. You need to be at least 18 years old on the day of the election. So even if you are 17 right now, you can still register if you will be 18 on Election Day. You can register with your County Clerk. Every state has a rule: you have to register before the election. (This does not apply to Wyoming.) The deadline to register is different for every state. Before the deadline, you have to fill out a voter registration form. Then you have to mail it to your County Clerk. That mailing address is usually listed on the back of the registration form.

## **Activities**

- Find your state's deadline to register.
- Get a voter registration form.
- Fill it out (it's OK to have someone help you fill it out).
- Mail it to your County Clerk.



## Resources

- List of deadlines by state: <http://www.rockthevote.com/voting-is-easy/important-dates/>
- Contact Information for Secretaries of State: <http://www.rockthevote.com/voting-is-easy/the-voting-process/contact-sos/>
- Voter Registration Information by State: [http://www.votesmart.org/voter\\_registration\\_resources.php](http://www.votesmart.org/voter_registration_resources.php)
- Contact information for your County Clerk and Secretary of State can also be found at the front of your local phonebook.

## Methods of Voting

You can vote many different ways. The options you have for voting are different in every state.

### **Voting at the Polls**

If you vote at the polls, you will be voting on Election Day. If you choose this option, you will physically go to your assigned polling place on Election Day. Once you register to vote, your County Clerk will send you a voter registration card that tells you where your polling place is. It is usually somewhere in your neighborhood, but if you live in an area with fewer people, you may have to travel a longer distance. It is important that you show up at the polling place that is assigned to you. You will not be allowed to vote at any other spot.

Once you get to the polling place, you may have to show some identification (I.D.). This way the people at the polling place know that you are the person you say you are. Rules about what kind of I.D. you need are different from state to state. Some states want you to have a government issued photo I.D. (such as a driver's license or state I.D. card) and some do not. You can find the I.D. requirements for your state by asking your County Clerk or Secretary of State's office.



Once you show your I.D. you may be handed a ballot or shown to a booth. Some ballots will have you punch out a hole next to the candidates and issues you want to vote for. Other ballots will ask you to fill-in a box, circle, or complete an arrow next to your choices.

Some states may not have paper ballots at all. These states may have electronic voting systems. If this is the voting system in your state, you will be asked to go into a booth where the machine is kept. Electronic voting systems are not all the same. Usually they will ask you to push a button or pull some kind of lever after looking at each candidate or issue on a computer screen.

Whatever kind of voting system your state has, it is important to follow the directions on the ballot or the screen. Your vote can be thrown out if the ballot is not filled out in the right way.

## **Other Ways of Voting**

You can also vote by mail-in or absentee ballot. Some areas of the country are starting to run all of their local elections by mail-in ballot only. Even if you are not in one of these areas, you can still ask for an absentee or mail-in ballot. If you get an absentee or mail-in ballot, you will fill it out at home and send it or hand deliver it to your County Clerk before Election Day.

An absentee or mail-in ballot is always on paper and will ask you to fill in a box, fill in a circle, or complete an arrow next to the candidate or issue you want to vote for. You can have someone help you fill out the absentee or mail-in ballot. Many states ask the person that helped you fill out the ballot to also sign or print his/her name somewhere on the ballot.

If you want to vote using an absentee or mail-in ballot, you need to ask for one ahead of time. You can do this by contacting your County Clerk or Secretary of State's office. Many states have deadlines for requesting an absentee or mail-in ballot. Be aware of these deadlines if you want to vote this way.

Many states will not let you vote at the polls on Election Day if you ask for an absentee or mail-in ballot and change your mind at the last minute. Be sure you know the rules and deadlines for your state.



## Activities

- Decide whether you want to vote at the polls or at home.
- If you want to vote at the polls, make sure that you have the right form of identification for your state.
- If you are going to a polling place, make sure you know where your assigned polling place is.
- If you are voting at a polling place, make sure you know when your polling place opens and closes.
- If you want to vote at home, make sure you ask for an absentee or mail-in ballot.
- If you want to vote at home, make sure that once you get your ballot, you mail it in by the deadline.

## Resources

- List of I.D. Requirements by State:  
<http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/voterID.laws.6.08.pdf>
- List of I.D. Requirements by State Using a Map:  
[http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/HAVA\\_Map2.pdf](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/HAVA_Map2.pdf)
- Your Secretary of State's Office: contact information can be found on your state government's website or in the front of your local phonebook
- Rock the Vote has an online list of contact information for your Secretary of State: <http://www.rockthevote.com/voting-is-easy/the-voting-process/contact-sos/>



## Inaccessible Polling Places

Polling places have to be accessible because of the laws. But some may not be. If your polling place is inaccessible, you will need to be your own advocate. Do not leave without either voting or saying something! You have a right to vote and you should exercise that right!

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) has a system for complaints that most states follow. Most states will make you file a written complaint with the Secretary of State's office. This complaint should include the location of the polling place and the areas that are inaccessible. Some states may have other things they want you to include. So it is always best to check the state's guidelines before sending in your complaint. A few states allow you to fill out a complaint form online.

If you are having trouble filing a complaint, you can also contact your state's Protection and Advocacy System. There is one in every state, and they help people with disabilities with accessibility problems.

### **Activities**

- Check with your Secretary of State's office to find out how to file a complaint.
- Check with your local Protection and Advocacy System to see if they can help you file a complaint.

### **Resources**

- National Association of Secretaries of State provides links to websites for all 50 Secretary of State Offices:  
[http://nass.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=89&Itemid=1](http://nass.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=89&Itemid=1)
- Rock the Vote also has a list of contact information for all Secretaries of State:  
<http://www.rockthevote.com/voting-is-easy/the-voting-process/contact-sos/>
- You can also find contact information for your Secretary of State in the front of your local phonebook.
- You can find your local Protection and Advocacy contact information at  
[www.ndrn.org](http://www.ndrn.org)



## **Finding Information About Candidates and Issues**

It is important to be an informed voter. You can find out about candidates (people running for office) and issues in many different ways. Most states produce a non-partisan (not in favor of either side) voter's guide before each election. This voter's guide will talk about each issue on the ballot. It may also have a list of arguments for and against each issue. In most states, these guides are sent to every household in the state. You may have to contact your Secretary of State if you need one in an accessible format.

Many private organizations also provide local and national information. These places can be good sources of information, but know that they may not be completely neutral.

You can also attend a town hall meeting, public event, or fundraiser for a candidate. These kinds of events are held in the months and weeks leading up to the election. Candidate websites and state political party websites should have a list of events in your area. Town hall meetings and "meet-and-greets" are usually free. Fundraisers may cost money to attend.

### **Activities**

- Find out what issues are going to be on the ballot.
- Find out who is running for office.
- Get a state voter guide.
- Visit candidates' websites.
- Attend town hall meetings and candidate events if possible.

### **Resources**

- State party websites.
- Candidate websites.
- State voter guide (from the Secretary of State).
- Private organization websites.



## General Election Resources

Here is a list of resources that might be helpful:

- **American Association of People with Disabilities Voting Page:**  
<http://www.aapd.com/dvpmain/dvpindex.php>
- Project Vote Smart (has candidate and issue information by state):  
[www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org)
- Rock the Vote (has information on registration and voting rights):  
[www.rockthevote.org](http://www.rockthevote.org)
- National Disability Rights Network (general voting information for people with disabilities): <http://www.ndrn.org/issues/voting/day/> and also at <http://www.ndrn.org/issues/voting/resources/>
- The Pew Research Center has a list of general voting resources:  
[http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/electionline\\_Info.aspx?category=admin](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/electionline_Info.aspx?category=admin)



**National Youth Leadership Network**

*The national voice for young leaders with disabilities*

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**This document was made by the National Youth Leadership Network.**

The National Youth Leadership Network (NYLN) is a voice for young leaders with disabilities. We live across the United States and its territories. This is a place where young leaders come together to support (help) other youth with disabilities. We believe youth can do a lot! NYLN tries to help youth at national, state, and local levels. We link them to opportunities for education, employment, and independence. NYLN also talks about things important to youth with disabilities, such as policies (laws) affecting our lives.

**For more information:  
National Youth Leadership Network  
[www.nyln.org](http://www.nyln.org) \*\* 1-866-480-6565**