

# Voters with Disabilities

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## General Guidelines

- Be courteous, patient and respectful. Treat all voters as you would like to be treated.
- Use common sense.
- Don't underestimate people with disabilities. Physical disability DOES NOT mean lessened mental capability.
- People with disabilities are NOT all alike. All voters – including voters with disabilities – have different skills and personalities.
- Be considerate of the extra time it may take a voter with a disability or an elderly voter to do something, and be patient with all voters. **Do NOT put a time limit on a voter completing a ballot.**
- Always speak directly to the voter, not to the voter's companion, aide, or sign language interpreter.
- Offer assistance but do not insist or be offended if your offer is not accepted. The person may not want or need assistance but your asking will be appreciated.
- Remember that any voter may be accompanied by and receive assistance in voting from another person of their choice, unless that person is the voter's employer, agent of the voter's employer, an officer or agent of the voter's union, or a certified Challenger and Watcher. The assistant must read and sign a *Voter Assistance Form*. Refer to the *During Voting Hours* section in *Chapter 3* for details about the *Voter Assistance Form*.
- If two Election Judges of different political parties are assisting a voter, they must complete and sign a *Voter Assistance Form*. Refer to the *During Voting Hours* section in *Chapter 3*.
- If your polling place is in a building with several routes through it, be sure to follow the polling place layout provided by the BOE. Make sure there are sufficient signs to lead a person to the most direct and accessible way to the Voting room.
- Be aware of obstacles and hazards that could cause injury. Notify building staff of safety concerns.
  - Fasten floor mats, rugs, and power cords securely with duct tape or move them out of the way.
  - Keep floors as dry as possible.
- Keep the ramps and wheelchair-accessible doors to the polling place unlocked and free of clutter.

- If necessary, be creative about ways to accommodate voters with disabilities. For example, **if a voter is unable to stand in line, ask the voter waiting in line directly in front of this voter to serve as a placeholder**, by holding the “Elderly and/or Disabled Voter Line Placement Card”. Shortly before the voter holding the card reaches the Check-In table, the other voter can retrieve the card and resume their place in line.



- **Do NOT assume a voter cannot sign their own name.** Follow regular Check-In procedures and inform the voter when a signature is required. Let the voter inform you if they cannot sign their name. If the voter is blind or has low vision, the voter may ask you to guide their hand to the location on the paper in order for the voter to sign. Provide a guiding device such as a ruler or card for signing. Follow the procedure outlined in *During Voting Hours/Voters Who Cannot Sign* in *Chapter 3 – Responsibilities of Chief Judges*.
- Never ask or require a voter to provide proof of a disability. A voter’s disability may not be apparent to you.

## Voters who are Blind or have Low Vision

A voter who is blind may choose to vote independently using the audio ballot on a Visually Impaired Ballot Station (VIBS), a voting unit set up with a numeric keypad and headphones (see *Preparing the Accessible Voting Unit* in *Chapter 7 - Getting the Voting Units Ready*). The voter may also choose to have someone assist them while voting. Any voting unit can be set up as VIBS voting unit, but at least one VIBS unit should be set up and ready to use before the polls open.

The ballot will not display on the touchscreen when a voter is using the audio ballot on a VIBS unit to protect voting privacy.

A voter with low vision may choose to use the audio ballot or the magnified and high contrast options for the Voting Unit screen. The voter may also choose to have someone assist them while voting.

- Tell the voter your name and that you are an Election Judge as soon as you come in contact with the voter.
- Read any required information to the voter.
- **Voters using the audio ballot may need more time than voters using the voting unit screen ballot. Do NOT put a time limit on a voter completing a ballot.**
- If you are guiding a voter, offer your arm to the voter, rather than taking the voter's arm. Give the voter information that is obvious to voters who can see, i.e., stairs, obstacles, left turn, etc.
- If a person uses a service animal, walk on the opposite side of the voter from the animal. **Do not pet or otherwise distract a service animal without asking the owner (and be alert to others attempting to do so).** Service animals are highly trained and need no special care other than that provided by the owner.
- If a person uses a cane, walk on the opposite side of the voter. **Do not touch or take the cane from the voter.** Let the person determine where to place the cane while voting; however, it is reasonable for you to inform the person if the cane may be a tripping hazard to others.
- Explain how the voter can get your attention if needed, and tell the voter when you are leaving.

## Voters with Physical Disabilities

A voter with a physical disability may need to vote from a seated position (wheelchair or folding chair). The Voting Unit's screen can be set to a 90-degree angle with a bracket to best accommodate a voter in a seated position (see *Preparing the Accessible Voting Unit* in *Chapter 8 - Getting the Voting Units Ready*). The accessible Voting Unit usually also functions as the Visually Impaired Ballot Station (VIBS) unit; however, the keypad and headphones can be moved to the side if the voter is using a Voting Unit screen ballot.

- Ask before pushing or touching a voter's wheelchair or equipment. Respect that people using wheelchairs or equipment considers the equipment as part of their personal space.
- Before helping, ask. Grabbing someone's elbow could throw the person off balance. A voter with a physical disability might need to lean on a door while opening it. You might cause the voter to fall if you open the door too quickly.

## Voters with Speech or Hearing Disabilities

- A voter who cannot speak can give the Check-In Judge their name and address simply by writing it. Check-In Judges should have paper and pens readily available.
- Follow the voter's cues to determine whether speaking, gesturing, or writing is the most effective method of communication.
- If you can communicate by speaking, speak calmly, slowly, and directly to the voter. Use short, simple sentences. Ask one question at a time. Do not shout. Your facial expressions, gestures, and body movements will help the voter understand you.
- Do not speak for the voter or attempt to finish their sentences.
- Rephrase, rather than repeat, sentences that the voter does not understand. If the voter is still having difficulties, write it down on paper.
- Look directly at the voter while they are speaking. If you do not understand something the voter has said, ask the voter to say it again. Do not pretend that you understand if you don't. If you are still having difficulties understanding, provide the voter with a pen and paper and ask the voter to write down what they wish to communicate or ask another Election Judge to communicate with the voter.
- Speak directly to a person ("What is your name?"), not to their sign language interpreter ("What is his name?").

## Voters with Cognitive Disabilities

A voter with a cognitive disability may have difficulty comprehending, reading, writing, or communicating. A voter with a cognitive disability may choose to vote using the Voting Unit screen ballot or the audio ballot. The voter may also choose to have someone assist them while voting. **A voter's cognitive ability can NOT be challenged.**

- Be prepared to repeat what you say – either verbally or in writing.
- Allow time to understand the voter and make sure that the voter understands you.