



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

**CCD Rights Task Force Statement for
National Disability Voter Registration Week**

This week is National Disability Voter Registration Week. Voting is the foundation of our democracy and one of the most fundamental rights that Americans enjoy. People with disabilities represent more than 20% of the U.S. population, and can have a powerful influence if they are fully included in the voting and electoral processes. Voter turnout of people with disabilities surged in the 2018 election, as [recently described in Time Magazine](#). Since 2016, the nonpartisan [REV UP Campaign](#) has aimed to increase voter turnout and political participation among people with disabilities. It is important that people with disabilities register to vote, become informed about election issues, and participate in all aspects of elections—including as voters, poll workers, election officials, candidates, and [campaign staff and volunteers](#).

In addition to the Constitution, a number of federal laws protect the voting rights of people with disabilities, including the Voting Rights Act, the National Voter Registration Act, the Help America Vote Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Despite these protections, however, widespread barriers continue to prevent many people with disabilities from voting or registering to vote. For example:

- Many polling places and voting equipment remain inaccessible to people with disabilities. In too many cases, inaccessible polling sites and equipment have the effect of preventing people with disabilities from voting or requiring them to overcome extraordinary hurdles in order to vote. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that in the 2016 election, 60 percent of polling places had one or more impediments inside or outside the voting area that would make it difficult for people with disabilities to vote.¹
- The opportunity to cast one's ballot in private is a core element of the election system. The secret ballot is essential to protect against voter intimidation. Yet many people with disabilities are denied the opportunity to vote privately. For example, voters with visual impairments are too frequently required to communicate their voting choices to another person and rely on that person to cast their ballot for them. A National Council on Disability report found that 20% of voters with disabilities reported being unable to exercise a private and independent vote in the 2012 elections.²

¹ U.S. Gov't Accountability Office, GAO 18-4, *Voters with Disabilities: Observations on Polling Place Accessibility and Related Federal Guidance* (Oct. 2017), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/687556.pdf>

² National Council on Disability, *Experience of Voters with Disabilities in the 2012 Election Cycle*, at 62 (2013).

- Online voter registration systems are frequently inaccessible to people with disabilities. While online registration is an important tool to increase access to the franchise, a review by the ACLU and the Center for Accessible Technology of the 20 states offering online registration in May 2014 found that only one state’s online voter registration website was fully accessible, and most state websites do not even meet basic standards of accessibility.³
- Many people with disabilities are inappropriately prevented from voting due to overbroad voter competence requirements imposed on people with disabilities by state laws or by election officials, poll workers, or disability service providers. These requirements are typically applied only to people with disabilities, and effectively impose higher standards on individuals with disabilities than on others to demonstrate that they should be allowed to vote.⁴
- In addition to voting, people with disabilities face barriers to other types of participation in the electoral process. For example, reasonable accommodations may be needed to address barriers that make it hard for people with disabilities to serve as poll workers, such as the unavailability of accessible transportation during the hours before polls open or after polls close.

The National Council on Disability’s report on the 2012 elections included the following findings:

- “People with disabilities continue to face barriers in exercising their voting rights because of architectural and physical barriers at registration and polling sites.”⁵
- “Voters with disabilities do not have equal access to voting systems because states and localities have not invested adequate resources, planning, and training to provide reliable, accessible voting technology.”⁶
- “Voters with disabilities face discrimination at voter registration and polling sites resulting from poorly trained election personnel and volunteers.”⁷
- “People with disabilities who are under guardianship face increasing barriers to voting owing to state laws.”⁸

We call on federal, state and local officials to work with the disability community to eliminate these barriers and ensure full and equal participation by people with disabilities in our voting and election systems.

³ ACLU & Center for Accessible Technology, *Access Denied: Barriers to Online Voting for Citizens with Disabilities* (Feb. 2015).

⁴ Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, Autistic Self Advocacy Network, National Disability Rights Network, and Schulte, Roth & Zabel, *Vote. It’s Your Right. A Guide to the Voting Rights of People with Mental Disabilities* (updated Oct. 2018), <http://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Voter-Guide-Updated.pdf>. A plain language version is at <http://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Voter-Guide-plain-language-Updated.pdf>.

⁵ National Council on Disability, *Experience of Voters with Disabilities in the 2012 Election Cycle*, at 83.

⁶ *Id.* at 85.

⁷ *Id.* at 88.

⁸ *Id.* at 99.