

helping tennessee vote

a poll worker's guide to assisting voters
with disabilities

For more information:



615.298.1080
800.342.1660

GetHelp@DisabilityRightsTN.org



16% of eligible voters in Tennessee have a disability

—Rutgers University 2008 Study: “Disability and Voter Turnout”



the Poll Worker plays a large role

helping citizens access the ballot

table of contents

poll site accessibility

ensure polling site is accessible

be an effective communicator

be familiar with the accessible voting machine

helping voters with disabilities

assist voters with all types of needs

accommodations for voters with disabilities

locate & use election accommodations

resources

MANUAL COMMUNICATION BOARD

I NEED ASSISTANCE		I CAN	I AM	I WANT	VOTE	BECAUSE		YOU	YES	NO
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Q	W	E	R	T	Y	U	I	O	P	
A	S	D	F	G	H	J	K	L	SPACE	
	Z	X	C	V	B	N	M	.	?	
TO	I HAVE SOMEONE TO ASSIST ME			THE	AN	YOU ARE	PLEASE	THANK YOU		

“permission, liberty, or ability
to enter, approach, or pass
to and from a place or to
approach or communicate
with a person or thing.”

—merriam-webster dictionary



poll site accessibility

is your polling site accessible?

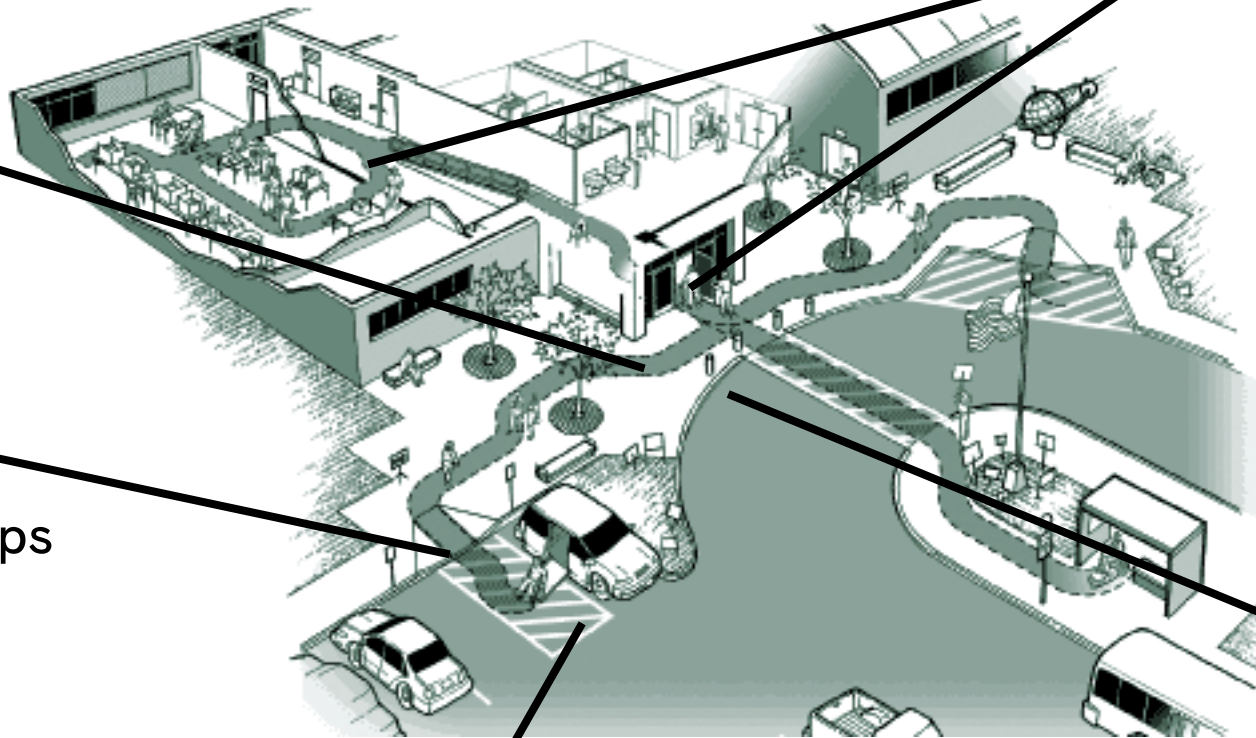
Barrier-Free
Pathways

Wide Doors
& Hallways

Curb Cuts
or Ramps

Accessible Parking

Signs for
the Accessible
Entrance



poll site accessibility checklist

Parking...

- ☑ Accessible spaces are close to the entrance.
- ☑ The passenger drop-off zone is level. (if applicable)
- ☑ Accessible spaces are marked with signs.
- ☑ There are enough accessible spaces. (min. 1 van accessible space per every 25 regular spaces)

Walkways are...

- ☑ Wide enough for a wheelchair or walker. (min. 32 in.)
- ☑ Free of debris, snow, and ice.
- ☑ Marked with signs clearly pointing voters to the accessible entrance.

At Check-In...

- ☑ Magnifying devices and communication boards are out and readily available.
- ☑ Seating is available for voters who need it while waiting.

Inside the Polling Site...

- ☑ All doors have levers or push bar handles.
- ☑ All doors on the accessible route are unlocked and can be opened by the voter.
- ☑ Accessible pathway inside the polling site is free of hanging or obtruding objects.
- ☑ Doors, hallways, & the voting areas are wide enough to maneuver a wheelchair.
- ☑ Temporary ramps are placed in the proper locations and elevators are in working condition.





The voting process can be intimidating, especially because most citizens only vote every two to four years. As the person voters will go to for assistance, know that there are different communication needs you might encounter.

are you a thoughtful poll worker?

understanding effective voter communication

Depending on his or her disability, a voter may require:

- ☑ Assistive Technology (see glossary)
- ☑ Pen & Paper
- ☑ Lip-reading
- ☑ American Sign Language Interpreter
- ☑ Communication Board

Remember to be patient:

- ☑ Some voters communicate in a way that may be difficult to understand.
They may require an assistant to help translate.
- ☑ Allow voters time to finish their thoughts or actions.
- ☑ Repetition may be necessary, for you or the voter.



The voter may select any person to assist them, except a candidate or poll watcher. If the voter does not have someone with them, they will be assisted by one of the judges of the voter's choice in the presence of either a judge of a different political party or an election official of a different political party.

See Tennessee Code Annotated § 2-7-116

Make no assumptions
Ask if assistance is needed
Allow space for the voter to speak
Listen
Communicate directly with the voter
Use People First Language
Speak at a normal volume unless otherwise asked
Repeat yourself as often as needed
Open doors
Answer questions
Give directions
Guide a voter around the polling place
Complete voting forms
Adjust voting machine
Activate voting machine accessibility features
Read the ballot for a voter
Mark a voter's choices
Demonstrate respect



helping voters with disabilities

respect the voter...

As poll workers, you are responsible for offering assistance to every voter.

Remember:

Be Respectful

Voters with disabilities want to be treated the same as everyone else. Show them the same respect you expect to receive.

Use People First Language

Always put the person before their disability:

“Person who is blind.”

“Voter who uses a wheelchair.”

Address the Voter

Some voters may have an assistant or an interpreter.

Always look at and speak to the voter, not the assistant.

Just Ask

Offer assistance to every voter. However, don't automatically assist unless the voter clearly needs help or has asked for assistance.

...relax and use common sense

can i assist you?

assisting voters with physical or mobility disabilities

"Yes, I need help..."

Filling out
paperwork.

Adjusting the voting
machine for my
wheelchair.

Removing barriers
from my path.

Opening a door.

"No, thank you."

Respect the voter's request.

Proceed with voter verification and ballot request.



helpful notes

- When communicating with a voter who uses a wheelchair, give them some space and speak with them at their eye level.
- When helping someone take a step or move, ask which is the best way to do so.



Important

Every polling place is required by law to have an accessible voting machine. Make sure you know how to adjust this machine for voters using a wheelchair.

If you do not, ask your *Supervising Election Official*.

can i assist you?

assisting voters with sensory & speech related disabilities

"Yes, I need help..."

Changing the color
contrast on the
voting machine.

Using the audio
headset on the voting
machine.

Knowing where
to go.

Communicating.

"No, thank you."

Respect the voter's request.

Proceed with voter verification and ballot request.



helpful notes

Voters who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Let the voter establish how they want to communicate. Examples include: paper & pen, lip-reading, and sign language.
- Directly face the voter when you speak. Speak normally and respectfully.
- Be prepared to move to a quieter area if necessary.



Voters who have a Visual Disability

- Always verbally identify yourself and others.
- When guiding someone, ask the best way to do so. Describe any obstacles as you approach them.
- Guide Dogs - Do not pet or distract a guide dog. It is responsible for its owner's safety.



helpful notes

Voters with a Disability that Affects Speech

- Be attentive, patient and always allow the voter to complete their thoughts.
- Repetition is a normal part of conversation. Indicate if you do not understand.
- Voters may use different forms of assistive technology to speak for them or to help them communicate.



Always communicate with the voter,
NOT their interpreter or assistant.





Important

Every polling place is required by law to have an accessible voting machine. Make sure you know how to activate the machine and its accessible features.

Accessibility features may include adjustments, audio headset, color contrast, accessible touchpad or swivel dial.

can i assist you?

assisting voters with cognitive & intellectual disabilities



“Yes, I need help...”

Simplifying all the
steps to casting
a ballot.

Understanding
how the voting
machine works.

Reading
the ballot.

Communicating.

“No, thank you.”

Respect the voter's request.

Proceed with voter verification and ballot request.



helpful notes

Voters with a Cognitive Disability that Affects Communication

- Keep your communication simple and respectful.
- Stay on point by focusing on one topic at a time.
- Repetition - If appropriate, repeat back any messages to confirm mutual understanding.
- Allow the voter time to respond, ask questions, and clarify your comments.
- Focus on the person, paying attention to any body language or gestures.

Excerpted from Tennessee Disability Coalition; *Disability Etiquette: Engaging People with Disabilities*



“to give consideration”

“make room for”

“find a suitable fit”

“to provide helpful service
as desired or needed”

—merriam-webster dictionary



accommodations for voters with disabilities

there are many accommodations
provided by your Election Office

you may be familiar
with some of them



Some accommodations for voters with vision loss may include tactile markers on voting machines or materials in large print (if available).



Provide extra seating as needed.
Allow those who need assistance to move to the front of the line.

navigate

- Signs & cones to create accessible parking spaces
- Temporary ramps for wheelchair access
- Signs to help mark the accessible path
- Door knob converters (for hard-to-open doors)
- Allowance for voters to move to the front of the line and vote sooner
- Seating for voters who cannot stand for long periods of time
- At least one voting machine that can be adjusted for a voter using a wheelchair



communicate

- Communication board
- Voter-owned communication boxes
- Voter's choice of companion or assistant to help them communicate





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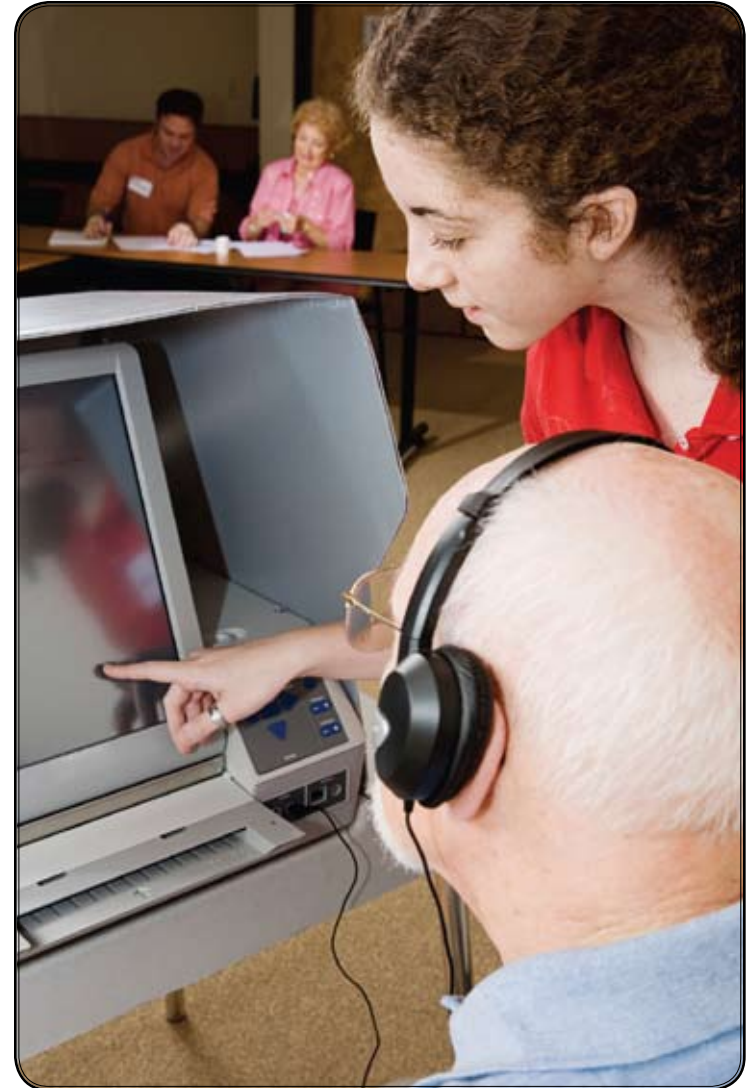


participate: vision & audio aids

- Magnifying lenses
- Signature guides to help voters sign their name
- At least one voting machine in every polling place that offers:
 - Headphones for voters to hear their ballot
 - Color contrasts on the voting screen, such as white text on a black background, for voters to read their ballot

other voter accommodations

- Voters may bring completed sample ballots to help remember their selection.
- Voters may request assistance from a poll worker or someone of their choice.



Accessibility:

permission, liberty, or ability to enter to and from a place or to approach or communicate with a person or thing

Accommodations:

something supplied for convenience or to satisfy a need

American Sign Language (ASL):

the primary language of many individuals who are deaf, conveyed by a system of articulated hand gestures in relation to the upper body

Assistance:

to give support or aid

Assistive Technology:

assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices used to aid people with disabilities in everyday activities such as communication and mobility; e.g. electronic communication devices, voter-owned voice boxes, screen readers for people with vision loss, etc.

Cognitive Disability:

a disability that affects conscious intellectual activity such as thinking, reasoning, or remembering

Physical Disability:

a disability that affects mobility in any part of the body

Sensory Disability:

a disability that affects the senses, including vision, hearing, and touch

HAVA:

the Help America Vote Act of 2002; mandates every precinct to have one voting machine that is accessible to people with disabilities, statewide voter registration database, provisional ballots, and a system to check for errors

People First Language:

the practice of referring to the person before their disability

Examples: “Voter with vision loss”

“Woman with cerebral palsy”

“Man with Down Syndrome”

“Someone who uses a wheelchair”





Tennessee State Capitol Building; Nashville, TN

tennessee bill of voting rights

1. The Constitution of the United States of America says I have the right to take part in my civic life.
2. If I am registered to vote in Tennessee, I have the right to vote in this election.
3. I have the right to vote by myself or with help. I can select who I want to assist me.
4. Even if I have a conservator, I may vote unless a court specifically said I cannot.
5. I have the right to vote the way I want.
6. I have the right to get help if someone tries to stop me from voting.
7. I have the right to be shown how to make my choices on my ballot.
8. If I am waiting in line when the poll closes, I must be allowed to vote.
9. If I am prevented from voting, I may stay at the polling site and call for help from one of the groups listed below.

TN Secretary of State; Division of Elections: 615.741.7956 or 877.850.4959

Learn more about the GoVoteTN app at [GoVoteTN.com](https://www.GoVoteTN.com)

Disability Rights Tennessee: 615.298.1080 or 800.342.1660

Local County Election Office: tnsos.org/elections/election_commissions.php

poll worker resources

- **Election Assistance Commission**
www.EAC.gov
- **National Technical Assistance Center for Voting & Cognitive Access**
www.sabeusa.org/govoter
- **Tennessee Secretary of State; Division of Elections**
www.sos.tn.gov/elections

Phone: 615.741.7956
Toll Free: 1.877.850.4959
- **Disability Rights Tennessee (Voting Access Program)**
www.DisabilityRightsTN.org

Phone: 615.298.1080
Toll Free: 800.342.1660
- **Tennessee Disability Coalition (Get Out the Vote Program)**
www.TNdisability.org/voting-rights

Phone: 615.383.9442
Toll Free: 888.643.7811

“Who are to be the electors of the Federal Representatives?

Not the rich more than the poor;

not the learned more than the ignorant;

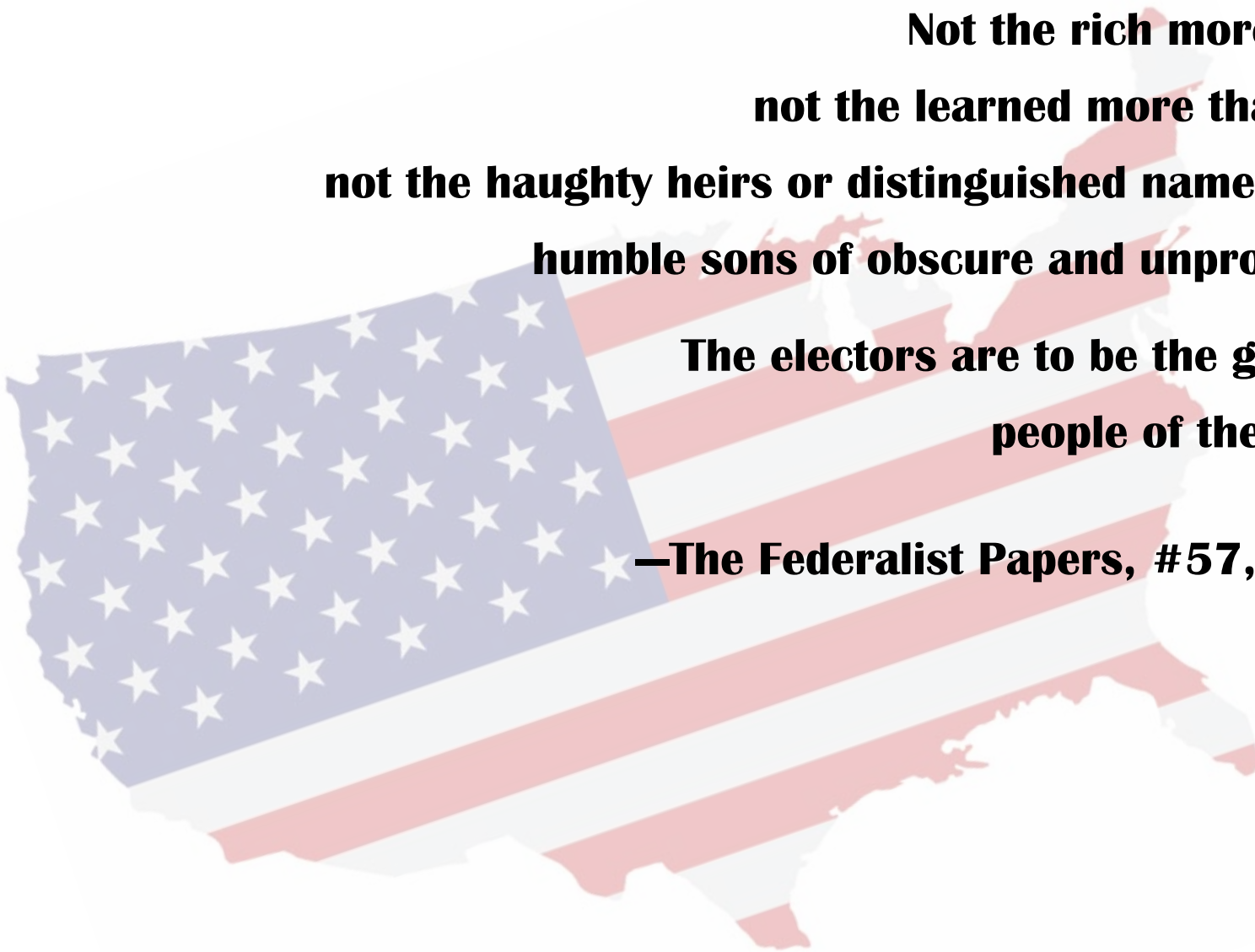
not the haughty heirs or distinguished names more than the

humble sons of obscure and unpropitious fortune.

The electors are to be the great body of the

people of the United States.”

—The Federalist Papers, #57, James Madison



thank you
you make a difference when you
help tennessee vote

Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT)
2 International Plaza, Suite 825
Nashville, TN 37217



Phone: 615.298.1080
Free: 1.800.342.1660
www.DisabilityRightsTN.org

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