

## Voting Rights of People with Disabilities

You have the right to vote whether you have a disability or not, as long as you are registered to vote in Texas. If your voting rights are violated because of a disability, contact Disability Rights Texas at 1-888-796-VOTE (8683) or [info@disabilityrightstx.org](mailto:info@disabilityrightstx.org).

### Some of your specific rights include:

**ACCESSIBILITY:** State law requires that all polling places meet strict accessibility standards including the following criteria:

- The voting area must be (1) on the ground floor, meaning it can be entered from the street; or (2) accessible by an elevator with doors that open at least 36 inches wide;
- Entrance and exit doors must be at least 32 inches wide;
- Any curb next to the main entrance to the polling place must have curb-cuts, or temporary non-slip ramps;
- Any stairs necessary to enter or leave the polling place must have handrails on each side of the stairs, and also have a non-slip ramp; and
- The polling place may not have any barriers that impede the path of a voter with a physical disability, such as gravel, automatically closing gates, closed doors without lever-type handles, etc.

**PRIVATE BALLOT:** It is your right to cast a ballot privately and independently.

### • SPECIAL VOTING DEVICES

- Beginning January 1, 2006, every polling place used in Texas elections must have at least one Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) voting device which is designed to assist voters mark their ballot in a private and independent manner. This applies to early voting places, too.
- DRE's come with assistive attachments that allow voters with disabilities to vote independently. For example a person with a visual impairment can use headphones in order to hear the ballot read to them, and a person with quadriplegia can ask for the sip and puff attachment which will allow them to select their candidates in a private manner.

- **VOTING ASSISTANCE**

- If you need help in reading or marking your ballot, you can ask a friend to help you vote, or you can ask the election officials to help you. You can choose anyone you want to help you, except your employer, an agent of your employer, or an officer or agent of your union.
- You are entitled to receive assistance if you cannot read or write, or if you have a physical disability that prevents you from reading or marking the ballot. You do not have to provide proof of your disability.
- If you ask the workers at the polling place to help you, you will be assisted by two election workers on Election Day, or one election worker during early voting.
- The person helping you must read you the entire ballot, unless you ask to have only parts of the ballot read. The person helping you must also take an oath that he or she will not try to influence your vote, and will mark your ballot as you tell them to.
- If you choose to be assisted by polling place officials, poll watchers and/or state and federal election inspectors present in the polling place may observe the voting process to be sure that the ballot has been marked as you requested. If you ask to be assisted by a person of your choosing, no one else may watch you vote.
- It is illegal for a person assisting you to try to influence your vote, to mark your ballot in a way other than the way you have asked, or to tell anyone how you voted.

**INTERPRETERS:** If you do not understand the language being spoken in the polling place or you do not understand the language that the ballot is written in, you have the right to an interpreter.

- If you cannot speak English, or if you communicate only with sign language, you may use an interpreter to help you communicate with election officials.
- If you cannot read the languages on the ballot, your interpreter can translate the ballot for you in the voting booth.
- If you are deaf and cannot bring someone to interpret for you, see if your county provides an interpreter at any of the polling places during Early Voting or request an interpreter before the election. Disability Rights Texas can assist you in requesting interpreters.

**ALTERNATIVE VOTING METHODS:** You may find it easier to use one of the following alternative voting methods:

- Curbside Voting
  - Curbside voting is available during early voting and on Election Day.
  - If you are physically unable to enter the polling place, you may ask that an election officer bring a ballot to you at the entrance of the polling place or to a car at curbside. After you mark the ballot, give it to the election officer who will put it in the ballot box. Or, at your request, a companion may hand you a ballot and deposit it for you.
- Early Voting
  - If you find it difficult to vote at your assigned polling place on Election Day, you may choose to vote at a more convenient time and location by voting early.
  - You can vote early in person during the early voting period, which begins 17 days before Election Day and ends four (4) days before Election Day.
  - You can vote at any early polling place in your county.
- Vote-by-Mail
  - Vote-by-Mail is a method of conducting elections. Instead of using traditional polling places where voters go to cast ballots on Election Day, you can have a ballot mailed to you if you are a registered voter. You then mark the ballot, and mail it back to the county clerk to be counted.

**PROVISIONAL BALLOTS:** You have the right to complete a provisional ballot if there is any question about your eligibility.

- Voters whose eligibility is in question will be allowed to cast a provisional ballot that will be counted once election officials determine the voter is eligible.

**VOTER REGISTRATION:** People with disabilities have the right to register to vote.

- Many people who have limited guardianships still have the right to vote. They have that right unless a judge specifically orders that they cannot vote.
- Under the Motor Voter Act, you have the right to register to vote at any state agency that provides you public assistance, and at all offices that provide state-funded programs designed to help persons with disabilities. This includes, for example, Department of State Health Services, Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Department of Transportation, etc.

***If you need assistance in registering to vote, have questions regarding voting or feel that any of your voting rights have been violated, please contact:***

Disability Rights Texas  
2222 West Braker Lane  
Austin, Texas 78758  
1-888-796-VOTE (8683)  
[info@disabilityrightstx.org](mailto:info@disabilityrightstx.org)

Secretary of State  
P.O. Box 12060  
Austin, Texas 78711-2060  
(512) 463-5650 or 1-(800) 252-VOTE (8683)  
Fax: (512) 475-2811; TTY: 7-1-1  
[www.sos.state.tx.us](http://www.sos.state.tx.us)

*Disability Rights Texas' goal is to make each handout understandable by and useful to the general public. If you have suggestions on how this handout can be improved, please contact Disability Rights Texas at the address and telephone number shown on the agency website [[www.DisabilityRightsTx.org](http://www.DisabilityRightsTx.org)] or e-mail Disability Rights Texas at [[info@disabilityrightstx.org](mailto:info@disabilityrightstx.org)]. Thank you for your assistance. This handout is available in Braille and/or on audio tape upon request. Disability Rights Texas strives to update its materials on an annual basis, and this handout is based upon the law at the time it was written. The law changes frequently and is subject to various interpretations by different courts. Future changes in the law may make some information in this handout inaccurate. The handout is not intended to and does not replace an attorney's advice or assistance based on your particular situation.*