

## Accessible Building Requirements

To be considered accessible, a polling place must satisfy strict accessibility standards, including the following:

- The polling place must be on the ground-level floor or be accessible from the ground-level floor by an elevator with doors that provide an opening of at least 36 inches in width;
- Doors, entrances, and exits used to enter or leave the polling place must have a minimum width of 32 inches;
- Any curb adjacent to the main entrance to a polling place must have curb cuts or temporary nonslip ramps;
- Any stairs necessary to enter or leave the polling place must have a handrail on each side of the stairs and a nonslip ramp; and
- The polling place may not have a barrier that impedes the path of a person with physical disabilities to the voting station. (Sec. 43.034(a)).

If you have additional questions regarding polling place accessibility, please contact our office.

# Polling Place Accessibility & Ensuring Effective Interaction

## Requirements

- Doors, entrances and exits used to enter or to leave the polling place must have a minimum width of 32 inches.
- Any curb next to the main entrance to the polling place must have curb-cuts.
- The polling place may not have any barriers, such as gravel, automatically closing gates, closed doors without lever-type handles, or any other barrier that impedes the path of persons with physical disabilities as they travel to the voting station.
- Accessible parking spaces must have room for the vehicle and an additional space that serves as an access aisle — at least 8 feet for an accessible van.

## Accessibility Solutions

- Keep poll entrance doors unlocked and/or open during voting hours.
- Keep a few chairs handy for those needing a place to sit.
- Make sure there is adequate space for those in wheelchairs to maneuver in/out and while voting.
- Let all poll workers and voters know the proper procedure for handling curbside voting in advance of Election Day.
- Mark accessible passages and entrances with easy to read, large print signs.

## Effective Interaction with Voters with Disabilities

- Voters with mental disabilities should be assumed to be competent to vote. Individuals accompanying these voters should be permitted to assist them.
- Voters who are visually impaired should be given the opportunity to vote independently. Ask if they need assistance. If they need assistance getting to the voting machine, gently guide them by the elbow to the voting station.
- It is okay to offer assistance, but be respectful if the offer is declined. If the offer is accepted, listen and/or ask for instructions on how best to assist the individual.

## Disability Etiquette

- If you cannot understand a person with a speech disability, don't be afraid to ask them to repeat — even three or four times.
- When meeting someone who cannot shake your hand, touch the person on the shoulder or arm to acknowledge their presence.
- If an interpreter is present, speak to the person, not the interpreter.
- Avoid euphemisms (e.g., physically challenged, differently abled).
- Do not hang or lean on someone's wheelchair.
- To facilitate conversation, utilize a chair when speaking to someone in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes.

- When communication with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing, do not exaggerate lip movement.
- Never pretend to understand someone if you have difficulty in doing so. Ask questions that require short answers.
- Do not distract a person's guide dog or work animal from its job without the owner's permission.

For help, call the Disability Rights Texas Voting Hotline at 1-888-796-VOTE (8683).

Last updated: August 9, 2014

Publication Code: HA06



[www.DRTx.org](http://www.DRTx.org)

Statewide Intake: 1-800-252-9108

Sign Language Video Phone: 1-866-362-2851

Purple 2 Video Phone: 512-271-9391

Online Intake available 24/7: [intake.DRTx.org](http://intake.DRTx.org)

***Disclaimer:*** 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.*

# Basic Guide to Polling Place Accessibility

This is a basic guide to accessibility to assist in identifying barriers and potential solutions to ensure access to voters with disabilities. Election officials should try to select fully accessible polling places and conduct the full Department of Justice accessibility survey available at [www.ada.gov/votingck.htm](http://www.ada.gov/votingck.htm).

## Parking and Drop-Off Areas

- If parking is provided, at least one accessible parking spot that is nearest to the accessible entrance must be provided for every 25 regular parking spaces.
- The first accessible spot should be van accessible with an access aisle at least 8ft wide.
- Accessible parking spots should be relatively level and not have loose gravel or dirt.
- If drop-off area is provided, it should be level and have an access aisle that is at least 5ft deep and 20ft long where people can access entrance (near ramp if necessary).
- *Solutions:* Traffic cones can be used to mark accessible parking spaces and access aisles. Heavy duty mats can be used to level out uneven surfaces.

## Paths of Travel

- There must be an accessible path from parking spot to entrance and voting area.
- Path must be at least 36 inches wide and free of steps or level changes more than ½ inch.
- If accessible path crosses traffic, a marked crosswalk should be used.
- Where path crosses curb, a curb cut or temporary ramp should be used.
- Ramps can't be steep. For every 1 inch high, a ramp must be at least 12 inches long.

## Preventing Obstructions for Voters Who are Blind or Have Low Vision

- People who are blind can easily run into objects that hang from above (like tree limbs), are open beneath (like staircases), or protrude from the side (like trophy cases).
- *Solution:* Place a barrier within 27 inches of the floor so cane can detect the obstruction.

## Entrance to Polling Place and Voting Area

- Doorways must be at least 32 inches wide.
- Threshold must not be more than ¾ inches high at door and must be beveled on each side.
- No heavy doors.
- No slick, round door handles.

- *Solutions:* If door is too heavy to open easily, adjust door closer, disconnect operating arm, or prop door open on Election Day. If smooth round handles are on door, use temporary hardware or prop door open. If threshold is too high, use temporary threshold ramp on each side that is too high.

#### Voting Area

- An accessible voting machine on wheelchair accessible booth should be located along an accessible path in a location that ensures privacy.

**For help, call Disability Rights Texas' Voting Hotline at 1-888-796-VOTE (8683).**

Last updated: August 28, 2020

Publication Code: HA09



[www.DRTx.org](http://www.DRTx.org)

Statewide Intake: 1-800-252-9108

Sign Language Video Phone: 1-866-362-2851

Purple 2 Video Phone: 512-271-9391

Online Intake available 24/7: [intake.DRTx.org](http://intake.DRTx.org)

***Disclaimer:*** 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.*