

Right To Help: A Guide to Getting Help with Voting

Part I: Introduction

What is this guide?

This guide teaches you about your right to get help with voting. It tells you about:

- What kinds of help people can get with voting.
- The United States laws that give you the right to help.
- Who to talk to if you want to learn about voting and the right to help.

Who wrote this guide?



This guide was written by the National Coalition on Accessible Voting (NCAV). We are a group of disability rights and civil rights advocates. We help make sure everyone can vote! Our tagline is “**Access Your Right To Vote.**”

What is voting?

How We Wrote This Part

We used ASAN’s “[Your Vote Counts: A Self-Advocate’s Guide to Voting in the US](#)” to help us write this part.

The ASAN Guide talks a lot more about voting.

Check out the ASAN Guide!

What is voting?

Voting is a way to make decisions. Voting is used to make all kinds of decisions.

People vote by choosing between two or more options. The option that the most people choose wins.

For example:

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A group of friends could vote on what movie they want to see.

Each friend votes by picking the movie they want to see.

The friends count how many of them want to see each movie.

The movie that gets chosen by the most people wins!

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Voting is used for really important decisions. Voting is used to decide who runs the **government**.

A **government** is a group of people that make decisions for a place people live. For example, the government of the United States makes decisions about the United States.

Some parts of the government are run by a person other people voted for. The person who most people vote for will run that part of the government.

For example:

- The President of the United States helps make decisions for the United States. People all over the country vote for the President.
- State governors help make decisions for a state. People in each state vote for their state governor.

Voting that decides who runs the government is called an **election**. Voters choose the person they want to run the government by voting for them.

Someone who tries to get votes in an election is called a **candidate**. They want to run part of the government. Candidates have ideas about how to run the government.

A person votes in an election by using a **ballot**. A ballot is a list of people and ideas you can vote for. On the ballot, you choose the person or idea you want to vote for.

A ballot can be a piece of paper, or it can be words on a voting machine.

To vote, you have to turn in your ballot.

If you vote in person, ask a **poll worker** how to do this. Poll workers are people that work at polling places. Ask them if you need help and you did not bring anyone with you to the polling place.

If you vote by mail, ask a friend, family member, or another person you trust.

Voting in elections is really important. After a candidate wins an election, they make important decisions that change peoples' lives.

For example:

People who live in a state vote for their state governor.

They vote in an election.

They vote for the candidate whose ideas they agree with.

U.S. Territories - like Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands - also vote for their governors.

Candidates for governor have ideas about how to run the state. A governor gets to make their ideas happen.

Those ideas might change how schools, roads, or even plumbing work!

This is one reason it is **so important** to vote in elections. **Voting makes sure your voice is heard!**

Where can I learn more about voting?

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network has a guide on voting.

To learn more about voting and why it is important, read their Easy Read or plain language guide at: <https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/voting/>

The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law wrote a guide on voting with a mental disability.

Their guide is available in plain language at: <https://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Voter-Guide-plain-language-Updated.pdf>.

What words do I need to know to read this guide?

We have a list of Words to Know!

They are at the end of this Guide.

Part II: Rules and Laws About Voting Help

How We Wrote This Part

We used the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)'s [The Right to Voter Assistance for People with Disabilities memorandum](#) and [ASAN's Americans with Disabilities Act toolkit](#) to help us write this part.

Why would I need help voting?

There are lots of reasons you might need help! You might need help:

- Learning who you can vote for.
- Learning about what the people you can vote for want to do if elected.
- Learning the rules for voting in your state.
- Registering to vote.
- Reading your ballot.
- Filling out your ballot.
- Sending in your ballot.
- Getting to your **polling place** - a building you go to when you want to vote in person.

Every person needs different kinds of help.

This is because every voter is different.

One person might need help understanding their ballot.

Another person might not need this kind of help. They might need help turning in their ballot instead.

Voters may also need different kinds of help because not everyone votes the same way.

Voters can vote by:

- Voting in person at the polling place.
- Voting by mail.
- Voting by using a **ballot dropbox** – a box where you can drop off your mail ballot
- Voting by using a computer, in some states.

People with disabilities may need more help to vote than other people.

This does not mean people with disabilities cannot vote!

Who helps people with disabilities vote?

Every person gets help from different kinds of people.

People with disabilities might get help voting from:

- Friends.
- Family members.

- Caregivers.
- Neighbors.
- Poll workers at the polling place.
- Nursing home or group home staff.
- Advocates for people with disabilities.
- Other people.

Are there any laws that say I can get help voting?

Yes, there are! The two most important are:

- Section 208 of the **Voting Rights Act**. The Voting Rights Act is called “the VRA.” The Voting Rights Act became law in 1965.
- Title II of the **Americans with Disabilities Act**. The Americans with Disabilities Act is called “the ADA.” The ADA became law in 1990.

What does Section 208 of the Voting Rights Act say about voting?

The Voting Rights Act was created to make sure that your right to vote is protected.

The VRA has different parts. Each part does different things.

The parts are called sections.

Section 208 of the VRA is about getting help with voting. The law says that if you have a disability, most people can help you vote.

The only people who **cannot** help you vote are:

- The person you work for - your employer - and anyone who represents them.
- Your union and anyone who represents them

A union is a group of workers who join together to protect their rights at work.

You have a right to join a union, but the union cannot help you vote.

Ask someone you work with who is not your boss if you have a union.

Some states have more laws.

We talk about those laws in the “Are there any state laws that I need to know about” section.

What is the Americans with Disabilities Act?

The Americans with Disabilities Act is a law.

It says that people with disabilities should have the same rights as people without disabilities.

The ADA also says governments have to treat people with disabilities fairly.

The ADA says people with disabilities have the right to be free of **discrimination**. Discrimination is when people are treated unfairly because of who they are.

The ADA is made up of different parts.

The different parts of the Americans with Disabilities Act are called “titles.” Title II of the ADA is about state and local governments. The United States government uses a different law.

A **state government** is a group of people that runs a state.

For example, the state government of California is the government that runs California.

A **local government** runs a city, town, or other place smaller than a state.

For example, New York City’s local government runs New York City.

State and local governments run elections. Title II tells state and local governments they have to make elections fair for people with disabilities.

What does Title II of the ADA say about getting help with voting?

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) is part of the United States government.

They help make sure people follow United States law.

Sometimes, the Department of Justice talks about how a law works.

The Department of Justice talks about the ADA and voting rights at: <https://www.ada.gov/resources/protecting-voter-rights/>.

The Department of Justice says that the ADA gives you the right to have some help when voting. You have the right to help when you:

- Decide where to vote.
- Register to vote.
- Fill in your ballot.
- Turn in your ballot.

- Do anything else you need to do to vote!

The Department of Justice says you have the right to get help from almost anyone.

For example:

Let's say Mike wants to vote. Mike wants to vote in person.

Mike brings his friend to the polling place with him.

Mike has a hard time reading the ballot.

A poll worker asks if Mike needs help.

Mike says he is getting help from his friend.

Mike's friend is just his friend.

He does not represent Mike's employer or Mike's union.

Mike's friend helps him read the ballot.

Mike votes!

The Department of Justice says that if a rule stops a person with a disability from voting, the government has to change that rule.

For example:

A city could have a rule that says only poll workers can help you vote.

A person with a disability has trouble voting without their own support person.

The ADA says the city would have to let the support person help with the vote.

The Department of Justice says the ADA protects you **no matter how you vote.**

For example:

Jan decides to vote by mail. Jan is in a state where voting by mail is easy.

But Jan needs help filling in their ballot. Jan has a disability.

Jan gets their friend to help them.

The ADA says that Jan's friend can help.

Here is another example:

Mei decides to vote by mail. Mei is in a state where voting by mail is easy.

But Mei needs help putting the ballot in the mail. Mei has a disability.

Mei gets her friend to help her.

The ADA says that Mei's friend can help.

Here is another example:

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John decides to vote in person. John finds his polling place.

John goes to the polling place.

John needs help finding the line to enter the place where you vote. John has a disability.

John gets his friend to help him.

The ADA says that John's friend can help.

ALL of these people have the right to help. So do you. **Do not be afraid to vote!**

Are there any other rules or laws that say I can get help?

Yes!

The National Disability Rights Network looked at laws and rules on getting help.

They said that most courts agree that the ADA and Voting Rights Act give you the right to get help from a person of your choice.

Are there any state laws I need to know about?

Every state has different laws on getting help with voting.

State laws must follow the ADA and the Voting Rights Act.

But some states have laws that can make it harder to get help with some kinds of voting.

Some examples are:

- Laws that make it so only some people - like family members, caregivers, and poll workers - can turn in your mail ballot.
- Laws that make you or your helper sign a form or swear an oath to help you vote by mail.

- Laws that make it harder to wait in line to vote.

Some states have more laws about mail voting than they do about voting in person.

The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law has a list of state laws on voting by mail at: <https://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Absentee-Ballot-Requirements-by-State-2020-Update-FINAL.pdf>. (This list is not in plain language.)

State voting laws are complicated. Some state laws might be changed. Some will not change.

Check your state's laws on getting help before you vote.

You should talk to someone who knows the law in your state.

The **Protection and Advocacy organization** in your state is a good place to find out about the law.

Part III tells you how to find the Protection and Advocacy organization in your state.

What can I do to make it easier to vote?

You can make a voting plan! As part of your plan, you should:

- Check your voter registration.
- Learn about the different ways to vote in your city or town.
- Check when you have to vote.
- Check if you can vote early and how to do it.

- Decide how you will vote.
- Check if you have everything you need to vote.
- Check your state and city's voting laws and rules.
- Check your state's rules about getting voting help.

USA.gov has a guide to voting. You can find it at:
<https://www.usa.gov/features/guide-to-voting-2024>

Vote411 also has a voting plan. You can find it at:
<https://www.vote411.org/make-your-plan>.

Part III: Who to Talk to If You Want to Learn More About Voting and The Right to Help

There are lots of complicated laws about voting. Who can I talk to about them?

Every state has a Protection and Advocacy organization (P&A). P&As are groups that help people with disabilities who have legal problems.

P&As are mostly made up of lawyers. Lawyers know a lot about the law.

P&As were created by the United States government. There is a P&A in every state and U.S. territory.

Every P&A has a part that works on voting. This part of the P&A is called the Protection and Advocacy for Voting Accessibility (PAVA) program.

The PAVA person is not always a lawyer. But they work with the P&A's lawyers.

Go talk to your P&A if you want to learn about the right to help.

To talk to your P&A:

- (1) Go to <https://www.ndrn.org/about/ndrn-member-agencies/>;
- (2) Click on your state on the drop-down menu under "Select Your State or Territory"
- (3) Call or email your P&A!

You can also talk to the Election Protection Hotline.

The Election Protection Hotline is a phone number. If you call it, they will tell you all about how to vote in your state!

Call the Election Protection Hotline at: 1-866-OUR-VOTE.

If you use American Sign Language (ASL), call 301-818-VOTE.

You can find the Election Protection Hotline online at <https://866ourvote.org/>.

Are there any disability rights groups I can talk to?

Yes!

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)'s [REV UP campaign](#) has groups you can join in every state.

Go to <https://www.aapd.com/revup-join/> to find a REV-Up group in your area.

Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE)'s GoVoter program can tell you a lot about voting with a disability.

Most of what SABE writes is in plain language.

Go to: <https://www.sabeusa.org/govoter/> to learn more.

The National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) has information on voting from 2018 and 2020. Most of it is still good!

Go to: <https://ncil.org/votingrights/> to learn more.

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network made lots of plain language information on voting. We used some of their resources to write this guide!

You can find the Autistic Self Advocacy Network's voting guides at: <https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/voting/>

Part IV: Words To Know

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) is a law. It says that people with disabilities should have the same rights as people without disabilities.

The ADA says that state and local governments have to treat people with disabilities fairly.

A **ballot** is a list of people and ideas you can vote for. On the ballot, you choose the person or idea you want to vote for. A ballot can be a piece of paper, or it can be words on a voting machine.

To vote, you have to turn in your ballot. If you vote in person, ask a poll worker how to do this. If you vote by mail, ask a friend, family member, or another person you trust.

A **ballot dropbox** is a box where you can drop off your mail ballot. If you drop off your ballot in the box, your vote is counted.

A **candidate** is someone who wants to run part of the government. They try to get people to vote for them.

Discrimination is when people are treated unfairly because of who they are.

An **election** is important voting. In this guide, election means an event where people vote for someone they want to run part of the government.

A **government** is a group of people that make decisions for a place people live. For example, the government of the United States makes decisions about the United States.

A **local government** runs a city, town, or other place smaller than a state. For example, New York City's local government runs New York City.

A **polling place** is a building you go to when you want to vote in person. Going to a polling place is one way you can vote.

You have to go to a polling place nearby where you live. To find your polling place, go to <https://www.vote.org/polling-place-locator/> and look for your state's polling place locator. Use the locator to find your polling place.

Poll workers are people that work at polling places. Ask them if you need help and you did not bring anyone with you.

Registering to vote is something that has to happen before you vote in an election. You tell your government your name, where you live, and what political party you are in.

The government puts this information on a list of people who can vote. This lets you vote in an election.

You need to register to vote in almost every state.

A **state government** is a group of people that runs a state. For example, California's state government runs California.

Voting is a way to make decisions. People vote by choosing between two or more options. The option that the most people choose wins.

Voting machines are machines that you can vote on. These machines are easier for people with disabilities to use.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is a law. It helps make sure everyone can vote. Section 208 is a part of this law. Section 208 says that you can get help with voting.