



## ***Disability Awareness in the Voting Place***

### **The Voting Place must be Accessible**

- ✓ People with disabilities must have the same opportunity to fully access and fully participate in the voting process, including privacy and independence
- ✓ All people have the right to be treated with dignity and respect in all aspects of the voting process
- ✓ No registered voter should be denied the right to vote solely on the basis of physical or mental disability
- ✓ If a voter cannot get into the polling place, the voter does not have the same opportunity as other voters. Access must be provided on the day of the election
- ✓ If election workers treat a person with a disability in a discriminatory manner, the voting process is not accessible at that polling place

### **Election Workers and Disability Awareness**

Barriers to voting may include the way election workers interact with voters with disabilities. Many people with disabilities may assume that the polling place is not accessible, and may cast absentee ballots to avoid embarrassment.

Voters who have disabilities should be encouraged to participate in the voting process in the manner in which they choose. Since people with disabilities have different individual needs, it is difficult to predict all accommodations that could be provided. Election officials and workers must be educated in order to understand disability and accommodations.

People with disabilities should be viewed in terms of the whole person and not just their disability. Many people will need extra time to move, speak, perform a task, or participate in the voting process. The behavior of some people with developmental or cognitive disabilities may be unsettling to people unfamiliar with these disabilities.

### **Tips for Interacting with Voters with Disabilities**

- ✓ Train poll workers in disability etiquette. If someone is blind or visually impaired, identify yourself and offer assistance
- ✓ Provide magnifying devices for those who request them
- ✓ The recommended size for "large print" materials is 18 point sans serif font
- ✓ Have a pad of paper and pen handy in case someone is deaf or unable to speak
- ✓ If the accessible entrance is not obvious, provide directional signs that meet ADA standards
- ✓ Provide a private voting station with a maximum height of 34 inches for individuals who use a wheelchair and people who need to sit
- ✓ Make provisions to ensure that walkways are free of hazards like ice, snow, leaves, or other debris on the day of election
- ✓ Complete the U.S. Department of Justice's [ADA Checklist for Polling Places](http://www.ada.gov/votingck.htm) found at <http://www.ada.gov/votingck.htm> to identify any physical barriers

## **Tips for Communicating with Individuals Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

- ✓ Get the person's attention (tap on shoulder)
- ✓ Look directly at the person while communicating
- ✓ Talk in a normal manner – slowly and clearly; do not yell or exaggerate your speech
- ✓ Write information down if your message is not being received
- ✓ Avoid standing in front of a bright light source such as a window
- ✓ If not understood at first, repeat your thought or rephrase your thought
- ✓ Use an interpreter for the deaf when necessary to facilitate your conversation
- ✓ Use your body language and facial expressions

## **Service Animals are Welcome!**

A "service animal" is usually a dog and is individually trained to perform specific tasks to assist an individual with a disability. Examples include an animal that guides a person with a visual impairment, assists an individual with mobility, or picks up objects for a person using a wheelchair. A service animal is not a pet and cannot be denied access to public places or voting locations under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

## **You Can File a Complaint**

The Help America Vote Act requires that polling places be accessible. Other federal and state laws also require that polling places be accessible. If you feel an individual's voting rights have been violated or that you may have witnessed an election law being broken, contact the State Board of Elections at 1-800-552-9745, or via email at [info@sbe.virginia.gov](mailto:info@sbe.virginia.gov). You can also call VOPA at 1-800-552-3962 or at (804) 225-2042 to request our help. We may be able to work with the Registrar to address accessibility problems.

## **How Can VOPA Help?**

VOPA can provide information, technical assistance and, in some cases, legal representation.

**Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy**  
1910 Byrd Avenue, Suite 5  
Richmond, Virginia 23230  
(804) 225-2042 (local and TTY)  
(800) 552-3962 (statewide)  
804-662-7057 (fax)  
[www.vopa.virginia.gov](http://www.vopa.virginia.gov)  
[general.vopa@vopa.virginia.gov](mailto:general.vopa@vopa.virginia.gov)

***VOPA publications are available in alternate format, upon request.***