

Your Rights as a Voter with a Disability



A Self-Help Publication

of



**DISABILITY RIGHTS
CONNECTICUT**

Justice. Community. Inclusion.

Introduction

As a member of a democratic society, you not only have the right to vote; you have the responsibility to vote!

**No vote is ever wasted.
Every Vote Counts!**



Disability voting rights laws ensure that people with disabilities have access to voter education, registration and the polling place, as well as use of the voting machine. The purpose of all these requirements is to create EQUAL OPPORTUNITY in every aspect of the voting process.

This booklet will introduce you to both basic voting information and some of the most significant laws that protect the voting rights of people with disabilities.

The back cover of the booklet provides contact information for DRCT. Call us if you have any questions or if you think your rights as a voter with a disability have been violated.

Advocacy Tip

Become a Poll Worker - One way to become an effective voting rights advocate is to become a poll worker. Call Disability Rights Connecticut or your local Registrar of Voters Office for information.

The Connecticut Voter's Bill of Rights

The Connecticut Voter's Bill of Rights summarizes some of the basic voter rights laws enacted in the State of Connecticut. Most of it applies to people with and without disabilities. It is important that all voters become familiar with these rights.

The [Connecticut Voter's Bill of Rights](#) assures that all voters have a right to:

- Inspect a sample ballot before voting;
- Receive instructions concerning how to operate voting equipment on sample voting equipment before voting;
- Cast a ballot if you are in line when the polls are closing;
- Ask for and receive assistance in voting, including assistance in languages other than English where required by federal or state law;
- Vote free from coercion or intimidation by election officials or any other person;
- Cast a ballot using voting equipment that accurately counts all votes;
- Vote by provisional ballot if you are registered to vote and your name is not on the voter list; *
- Be informed of the process for restoring your right to vote if you were incarcerated for a conviction; and
- **Vote independently and in privacy at a polling place, regardless of physical disability.**

* *Applies only to elections when there are candidates for federal office on the ballot. (Connecticut General Statutes §9-236b)*

Help America Vote Act

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA), passed in 2002, includes sections on disability access. This important federal law, which applies to the whole country, requires that states:

- Provide accessible voting machines;
- Educate Registrars of Voters and poll workers on the voting rights of people with disabilities;
- Provide accessible polling places;
- Conduct outreach to people with disabilities on their voting rights.

Common Q&As for Voters with Disabilities

Voter Registration

What are the qualifications for registering to vote in Connecticut?

To register to vote in Connecticut, you must:

- Be a U.S. citizen;
- Be 18 years old on or by Election Day;
- Be a resident of a Connecticut town.

Convicted felons do not permanently lose their right to vote in Connecticut. If you are a convicted felon, your right to vote is restored when you are no longer incarcerated and not on parole. You also must have paid all fines in conjunction with the conviction. (Connecticut General Statutes §9-46a). Note: You can vote while you are on probation.

Where may I obtain a voter registration form?

Connecticut makes it easy to register to vote. By law, voter registration forms are required to be available at many public places. (Connecticut General Statutes §9-19h) You may also contact your local Registrars of Voters to obtain a registration form in person or by mail. The eligibility statement that is part of the registration process must be made available, upon request, in Braille, large print or audio to people with visual disabilities.

You may also acquire a registration form at any of the below locations. At some of these sites, you may also submit your completed form.

- Municipal Town Clerk Offices
- CT Department of Social Services (all offices)
- CT Department of Public Health
- CT Department of Motor Vehicles
- CT Department of Developmental Services
- CT Department of Rehabilitation Services
- Disability Rights Connecticut
- Public Libraries
- Colleges and Universities
- All Armed Forces Recruitment Offices
- Many nonprofit community organizations
- On the website of the Secretary of the State (www.ct.gov/sots)

Advocacy Tip

Submit the Registration Form Yourself - Even if you acquire a form at one of the above locations, it is often advisable to submit it yourself at your local Registrars of Voters Office. You can mail it to the Registrars or deliver it in person.

Advocacy Tip

Be aware of all due dates for registering to vote or acquiring an absentee ballot. Call your local Registrars of Voters Office or contact DRCT.

May I register to vote online?

Yes. Online registration enables prospective voters to complete the entire registration process on the computer. The site is maintained by the Secretary of the State. The website address is:

<https://voterregistration.ct.gov/OLVR>

The site explains the process and the identification requirements. You will note that 2 buttons at the bottom read:

- I do have a valid DMV ID
and
- I do not have a valid DMV ID.

If you click on the first button “I do have a valid DMV ID”, you will be led through the entire online registration process.

If you click on the second button “I do not have a valid DMV ID”, you will be led through the process of filling out a registration form, which you will then need to print out and deliver, by hand or standard mail, to your local Registrars’ Office. (Connecticut General Statutes §9-19K)

Advocacy Tip

When registering online, you will need to provide the number on your license or non-driver ID, so have it ready when you register.

Voting

Is it possible to register to vote on Election Day?

Yes. Election Day Registration (EDR) enables people to both register and vote on the day of a general election. The EDR site must be accessible to people with disabilities and assistance must be available for those who need help filling out the ballot. The EDR site is not located at a polling place. Contact your local Registrar of Voters office to find out where the EDR site can be found.

Like at a standard polling place, the hours are 6:00 AM – 8:00 PM. Unlike at a regular polling place, though, voters will not be allowed to vote if they are still in line at 8:00 PM. The site will close at that time whether or not there are people waiting.

Keep in mind that ID requirements for EDR are more stringent than those required of voters when they appear to vote at a standard polling place. Acceptable documents include, but are not limited to:

- Birth certificate;
- Driver's license;
- Non-driver photo ID (issued by Department of Motor Vehicles);
- Social Security card.

If the ID presented does not include residential address, the applicant must present an additional document that provides proof of residence.

Examples of such documents include, but are not limited to:

- Motor vehicle learner's permit;
- Utility bill due no longer than 30 days after the election;
- Paycheck;
- Naturalization papers. (Connecticut General Statutes §9-19j)

Do I have to show an ID when I go to the polls?

Yes. The following is simplified information about ID requirements in Connecticut.

Voters who are voting for the first time in a primary or election with federal candidates on the ballot must present:

- A current and valid photo ID that shows name and address
OR
- A current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or government document that shows name and address.

All other voters must present:

- A Social Security card
- Any pre-printed form of identification that shows
 - Name and address, **or**
 - Name and signature, **or**
 - Name and photograph.

In the absence of acceptable ID, a voter may cast a provisional ballot. These ballots are only available when candidates for federal office are in a race.

Once the identity of the voter has been confirmed, the ballots are analyzed and counted.

Are all polling places required to be accessible?

Yes. Polling places are required to provide a barrier-free route through all areas relevant to casting a vote. This includes pathways, doorways and corridors. Every polling place is also required to provide at least two accessible parking spaces if there is an existing parking lot. In unusual cases, a polling place may be granted an accessibility waiver from the State of Connecticut if an access problem cannot be solved before an election. Such waivers are considered temporary and generally last through only one election cycle. (Connecticut General Statutes §9-168d and §9-168e).

May I move to the front of the line on Election Day if my disability requires it?

Yes. Under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), moving to the front of the line when necessary would be a reasonable policy modification. If your disability prevents you from staying in line, let the election officials know and ask to be moved to the front of the line.

If you choose to stay in line, however, the election officials cannot make you move to the front of the line just because you have a disability.

May I use the voting system of my choice?

Yes. Connecticut offers two methods of voting at the polling place. One way is via the manual ballot; the other method, new in 2016, is via a tablet with optional voice output and keypad for voters who are unable to read the tablet. Anyone, with or without a disability, may vote by either method – it's up to you!



Advocacy Tip

Remember, you have the right to vote by the method you choose. Don't let anyone talk you into using one voting system or the other!

How does the manual ballot system work?

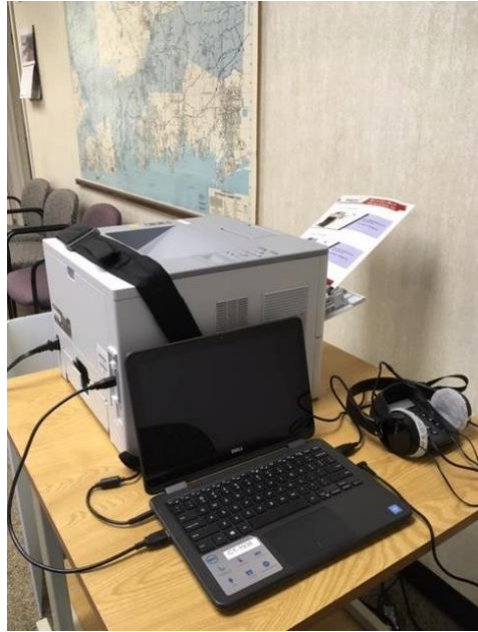
Each voter is given a paper ballot with the names of candidates (and, sometimes, referendum questions), along with a marker for filling in the circles next to your choices. Once you complete the ballot, you deposit it into the optical scan tabulator, which counts the votes.

How do I use the tablet ballot marking system?

The tablet system is a ballot-marking device that replaces the old phone/fax technology. The new technology includes a tablet and a keypad with head phones. You may vote using the touch screen on the tablet, or by using the connected audio system on the keypad. The audio system, which includes head phones, works by a series of cues requiring

you to push different buttons on the key pad to make your choices. Both the touchscreen and the audio provide you with the opportunity to review and revise your choices. After you are done voting (by either touchscreen or key pad), a printer marks a paper ballot to reflect your choices. The voter then feeds the ballot through the same tabulator that counts the ballots that were manually completed.

The audio component may be preferable for people with visual disabilities; people who prefer audio cues, including individuals who have difficulty reading; and people with learning disabilities.



Does the ballot marking system device remember how I voted?

No. Before printing your paper ballot, review that your choices are correct. If you make a mistake, you can ask the moderator to spoil your ballot. You will have to go through the process and make your choices again because the information is erased from the Interactive Voting System.

Is there a way to practice using the audio technology from home before Election Day?

The audio component of the ballot marking system is available for practice on the manufacturer's website. The audio component testing number is 888-661-6366. The test uses a mock Famous Names ballot.

May I vote from home using the tablet system?

No. The tablet system is only available at your polling place.

Must the tablet marking device be available for use during every election?

Yes. The tablet marking device must be available for use during every election and at the Election Day registration location.

Advocacy Tip

Learn about the voting technology before Election Day. Spread your knowledge to other people with disabilities so they know the options before showing up at the polls.

May I receive help in casting my vote?

Yes. If a voter requires assistance to vote by reason of disability or inability to write on or read the ballot, help may be provided by a person of the voter's choice, except: 1) the voter's employer; 2) an agent of the employer; 3) an officer or agent of the voter's union; or 4) a candidate on the ballot, unless that candidate is a member of the voter's immediate family. (Connecticut General Statutes §9-264)

Is curbside voting available in Connecticut?

Yes. Voters who are unable, for reason of disability or illness, to enter a polling place on the day of an



election may arrange to vote from their car. It is advised that such arrangements be made before arrival with the Registrars of Voters so that personnel are available to come out when the voter arrives. Two

designated polling officials will bring the ballot and, upon completion, return the ballot to the polling place and deposit it in the optical scanner. This service is available during elections and referenda. (Connecticut General Statutes §9-261 [b])

Can they make me use curbside voting if I have a disability?

No. The availability of curbside voting is not a substitute for an accessible polling place. If a voter experiences an illness or injury close to Election Day that prevents him/her from entering a polling place, curbside voting may be an option; this should be a rare occurrence.

How do I obtain an absentee ballot?

You may request an application for an absentee ballot from the municipal clerk in the town where you vote.

Does Connecticut have a permanent absentee ballot for voters with permanent disabilities?



Yes. Connecticut now offers a permanent absentee ballot for people with disabilities. After the initial application has been accepted, voters will be mailed annual renewal forms. These forms only ask for confirmation of the voter’s address. If the holder of a permanent absentee ballot does not reply, he or she will lose permanent absentee status, but will not be removed from the list of registered voters.

May I vote by absentee ballot if I am in some other kind of facility, like a nursing home or a hospital?

Yes. If twenty or more registered voters are in such a facility, then the office of the Registrars of Voters of the town in which the facility is located must supervise the picking up of the absentee ballots and the delivery of them to the Clerk in the voters’ home districts, as well as supervise the completion of the ballots and their submission. (Connecticut General Statutes §9-159r)

May I vote if I have a guardian or a conservator?

Yes. No one under guardianship or conservatorship may be denied the right to vote unless a probate court issues a specific order prohibiting this right. (Connecticut General Statutes §9-159s)



May I vote if I am living in a psychiatric institution?

Yes. Any person hospitalized in a facility for people with psychiatric disabilities has the right to vote unless a probate court issues a specific order prohibiting this right.

(Connecticut General Statutes §17a-541)

Can my right to vote be challenged at the polls?

Yes, but only under limited circumstances. Poll workers may only challenge a person's right to vote based on questions related to identity, valid disenfranchisement (legal loss of voting rights) or residency. Poll workers may not question a person's right to vote based on their perception of a voter's lack of competence or ability. (Connecticut General Statutes §9-232).

Is there a way for me to vote if I experience a health crisis shortly before an election, primary or referendum?

Yes. Emergency absentee ballots are available to people who experience a health crisis within six days of an election. Request for an emergency absentee ballot must be made to the Town Clerk's Office.

**For more information on the
Rights of Voters with Disabilities
contact:**



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