



***Ensuring the full participation of people with disabilities  
in the voting process.***

**Why is voting important?**

In the last Presidential election, only about half of the eligible voters in Maryland actually voted. Don't be overlooked! People with disabilities can have a significant impact on the political process.

Voting is one of the easiest ways to make your voice heard and your vote can make a difference! There are many laws and policies that directly impact issues important to individuals with disabilities, such as housing, transportation, health care and many others. Voting empowers you by giving you a say in who will be the officials making the laws and policies that directly affect your daily life.

***So get out and VOTE!***

**How does the Help America Vote Act help YOU or someone you know who has a disability?**

In 2002, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act, known as **HAVA**. This law creates election requirements for state election officials in order to improve the federal election process and to make it more accessible to people with disabilities. Some of the new requirements include:

- Each state must develop a centralized, computerized, and uniform statewide voter registration database to insure the accuracy of voter registration files.
- By 2006, each polling site will be required to have at least one voting machine that is accessible to people with disabilities.
- States must provide for provisional ballots to ensure that every voter is able to cast his or her vote if there is any question of eligibility. There must also be a system developed to notify the voter if his or her ballot was or was not counted, and if not, why not.

- States must develop a system that allows voters to check for errors on their ballots and make any corrections privately and independently.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### REGISTRATION

#### ***Who can register to vote in Maryland?***

To register to vote you must:

- Be a United States citizen
- Be a Maryland resident
- Be at least 18 years old by the next General Election
- Not be under guardianship for a mental disability
- Not have been convicted of buying or selling votes
- Not have been convicted more than once of a crime of violence
- Not have been convicted of an infamous crime (unless you have been pardoned, or you have completed the court-ordered sentence imposed for the first conviction or at least 3 years have passed since you completed the court-ordered sentence imposed for a second or later conviction).

#### ***How do I register to vote?***

You can register to vote in person at your County Elections Office, the State Board of Elections or at a state agency such as the Motor Vehicle Administration, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Department of Social Services, the Offices on Aging, the MTA paratransit certification office, and all public institutions of higher education.

You can also register by mail. Applications can be obtained by contacting your County Election Office. You can also print out an application at the State Board of Elections' website at [www.elections.state.md.us](http://www.elections.state.md.us) or use its 24-hour toll-free number, 1-800-222-8693. Mail the application to the address of your County Board of Election found on the form.

## POLLING SITE ACCESSIBILITY

### ***Does my polling place have to be accessible?***

Yes. This includes:

- Accessible parking spaces
- An accessible path of travel from the parking area to the polling place, including curb cuts where needed;
- An accessible entrance to the building, including ramps if necessary, and which is at least 32" wide;
- Signage indicating the accessible entrance; and
- Seating for voters waiting to vote

### ***What do I do if my polling site is not accessible?***

Before election day you can call or write to your County Board of Election to request an accessible polling site assignment. You must make the request for reassignment no later than the close of registration for any election.

## **VOTING**

### ***Can I get assistance if I need it to vote?***

Yes! You may bring someone to assist you as long as the person who is assisting you is not your employer or officer or agent of your union or employer. If you decide not to bring someone with you, you can obtain assistance from an election judge. Just inform an election judge that you will need assistance when you check-in to vote. If you are using the audio ballot you can tell an assistant or the election judge which numbers to press on the keypad and your audio ballot will remain private.

### ***Are the voting machines accessible?***

Yes. Maryland now has touch screen voting machines that are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

- If you are blind, have a vision impairment or have difficulty reading, you can request a magnified ballot or an audio ballot, which requires the use of headphones and a keypad. The voting screen is blank while the audio ballot is in use.
- The angle of the voting machines can also be adjusted for greater access.

***Do I need to show identification before I vote?***

Under federal law, if you register to vote by mail on or after January 1, 2003, you must provide identification before voting for the first time in Maryland. It is always a good idea to have identification with you when you go to vote.

***What if my name is not on the list of voters?***

If your name does not appear on the official list of eligible voters and you claim that you are eligible to vote, then you must be given the opportunity to vote using a provisional ballot. The County election office will determine whether your vote will be counted. You will be given information on how to check the status of your ballot using the Internet or by calling a toll-free number.

***If I reside in an institution, can I still vote?***

Yes. If you are confined or restricted to an institution, you can vote by using an absentee ballot if you meet the eligibility requirements listed above.

***If I am under guardianship, can I still vote?***

Under Maryland law, if you are under guardianship for a mental disability you are not eligible to vote.

**VOTING BY ABSENTEE BALLOT**

If you are unable to get to the polls on Election Day due to an accident, illness or a disability, you may vote by absentee ballot. Contact your local board of elections to request an application for an absentee ballot.

**FILING A COMPLAINT**

Any person who believes that there has been a violation of Title III of the Help America Vote Act may file an administrative complaint with the Maryland State Board of Elections. Title III includes voting system standards, accessibility of voting systems to persons with disabilities, instructions on correcting voting errors, identification requirements for voting in federal elections if registration is by mail, computerized statewide voter registration lists, and provisional ballots. The complaint must be in writing and notarized and must be filed within 60 days after the alleged violation. A copy of the complaint process and a complaint form can be obtained from the Maryland State Board of Elections at <http://www.elections.state.md.us/citizens/hava/>.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Maryland State Board of Elections  
(410) 269-2840 / (800) 222-8683  
[www.elections.state.md.us](http://www.elections.state.md.us)

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD Disability Vote Project):  
(202) 457-0046; (800)840-8844; [www.aapd.com](http://www.aapd.com)

League of Women Voters: (202)429-1965; [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

The National Mental Health Voter Empowerment Project: (NCSTAC):  
[www.ncstac.org](http://www.ncstac.org)

National Organization on Disability; [www.nod.org/political/index.cfm](http://www.nod.org/political/index.cfm)