

# **DISABILITY VOTER GUIDE**

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## What Is Voting?

Voting is a way for people to make decisions together.

Each person gets a vote.

A vote is a way that people say what they want to do.

Voting is very important in the United States (U.S.).

Voting is a way for every adult U.S. citizen to say what we want.

If you do not vote, then you do not get a say in what will happen.

In the U.S., we vote on **Election Day**.

Election Day is the day we vote for **candidates** we want.

Candidates are people who want to represent us in government.

Once candidates are elected, they become our **elected officials**.

Elected officials are people like our President, Senators, Representatives, Governors, Mayors, and council members.

When we vote, we choose who will represent the disability community.

The people we vote for will decide how important programs for people with disabilities work.

This includes programs like Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income.

On Election Day, we also may vote on other ballot measures.

Ballot measures are questions that are asked to voters.

This guide will help explain some basic information about voting.

## We will talk about:

- Who can vote
- Where people can vote
- How to register to vote
- How to find out who and what you can vote on
- How to learn about candidates and issues
- How voting works on Election Day
- What to do if your voting rights are violated
- How you can help others vote
- Other helpful resources around voting





## Who Can Vote?

**You can vote in U.S. elections if you:**

- Are a U.S. citizen.
- Will be 18 years or older by the day of the election.
- Live in the state where you want to register to vote.
- Are registered to vote by your state's voter registration **deadline**.

A deadline is the date or time that you must do something by.

Sometimes, people may think that people with disabilities cannot vote.

That is not true.

People with disabilities can and do vote!

This guide tells you more about the rules around voting.

## Who Cannot Vote?

- People who live in the U.S. but are not citizens, like permanent residents.
- Some people who have been convicted of crimes.

If you have been convicted of a crime, check with your state or local election office at [usa.gov/election-office](https://www.usa.gov/election-office).

## I have a guardian. Can I vote?

Unless your guardianship agreement specifically says you cannot vote, the Americans with Disabilities Act protects your right to vote.

Learn more at

[thearc.org/blog/this-election-year-know-your-voting-rights/](https://thearc.org/blog/this-election-year-know-your-voting-rights/).

## Not Sure If You Can Vote?

Check with your state or local election office at: [usa.gov/election-office](https://www.usa.gov/election-office).



## How Do I Register To Vote?

There are many places where you can register to vote.

### The most important things to do are to:

- Follow the rules in your state.
- Make sure you register by your state's voter registration deadline.

Each state may have different rules about how to register to vote and when you must register by.

You can find out more about how to register in your state at [thearc.org/registertovote](http://thearc.org/registertovote).

### What information do I need to have to register to vote?

Each state has different rules about what you need to have to register to vote.

You will likely need to have your address, name, Social Security number, and/or state or government identification (ID).

You may also need to decide what to list as your **political party**.

A political party is a group of people with the same political goals and opinions.

A political party works to vote candidates they like into government.

In the U.S., we have two main political parties.

These are Republicans and Democrats.





## Where Can I Vote In My Community?

Everyone who can vote votes at a **polling place** on Election Day.

A polling place is a location where you can vote in your community.

Polling places are often schools or community centers.

You can find your polling place at [thearc.org/register tovote](https://thearc.org/register tovote).

In some states, you can vote in other ways.

- Some people may be able to vote early at their polling place.

Voting early could be days or weeks before Election Day.

Voting early may be easier.

There may not be as many people at the polling place.

Or there may be more time to fill out a ballot.

- Some people may be able to do **absentee voting**.

Absentee voting happens when you vote without being at a polling place on election day.

**This is also called Vote by Mail.**

When you absentee vote, you get an absentee **ballot**.

A ballot is a form that we use to vote.

People who absentee vote complete their ballot before Election Day and then send it to be counted.

Each state has different rules about how to absentee vote.

In some states, everyone votes absentee or by mail.

So, it is very important to know the rules in your state.





## Interested in voting early or absentee?

Each state has different rules about whether you can vote early or absentee.

Some states do not allow you to vote early.

Some states do.

Each state allows people to absentee vote.

But deadlines and rules about who can absentee vote are different in each state.

Visit [thearc.org/register tovot e](http://thearc.org/register tovot e) to learn more about voting early or absentee.





## Who Or What Can I Vote On?

Each Election Day, we vote on different elected officials and issues.

We vote for some elected officials or issues every few years.

- We vote for **President** every four years.  
The President is a person who we vote on to lead the country.
- We vote for **Senators** every six years.  
Senators are people who represent an entire state.  
Senators serve in the U.S. Senate.
- We vote for **Representatives** every two years.  
Representatives are people who represent a part of a state.  
These people serve in our U.S. House of Representatives.  
Senators and Representatives are also called **Members of Congress**.
- We also vote for state representatives, senators, and governors.  
And, we vote for local representatives like mayors and town council members.

Some issues we only vote on once or when we need to.

These may be issues like:

- How we should spend government money.
- How we should change a law or a **state constitution**.

A state constitution is a written document.

This document includes rules and values that describe how a state should be run.

Sometimes, people call changes to laws or state constitutions **amendments**.

Amendments are changes to an existing law or constitution.

Amendments can make small changes or big changes to a law or constitution.

What people vote for also depends on which state, county, or city you live in.

You can find out what you can vote on each Election Day early.

You can do this by checking with your state or local election office at [vote411.org/ballot](https://vote411.org/ballot).

They will have the list of issues to vote on about two months ahead of Election Day.





## How Can I Learn About Candidates Or Issues To Vote On

Once you find out what you can vote on, it is important to make sure to learn about candidates and issues.

**You can learn more about candidates and issues in many ways:**

- Visit webpages about candidates or issues.
- Visit or follow candidates' social media pages.
- Read articles or watch local TV stations about candidates or issues.
- Watch or go to **debates** that candidates have.

Debates are when candidates discuss what they want to do and their ideas.

They will talk about why their idea is better than the ideas of other candidates.

- Check out how candidates answer questions about important issues.

[FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org) keeps track of candidates' statements about issues.


FactCheck is **nonpartisan**.

Nonpartisan means that they do not favor one candidate or party over the other.

They provide accurate information.

- Attend campaign events like rallies or town hall meetings.

These events are ways you can show support and learn more about a candidate in person.

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- Invite candidates to visit your local self-advocacy group.
  - Visit candidates' offices and ask questions.

Candidates will have an office in each state or area.

- Contact groups you trust to learn more about candidates and issues that matter to you.

Try to contact groups that are nonpartisan and that do not have a bias to one candidate or another.

### **The information I get about candidates and issues is not clear or is confusing. What should I do?**

If the information you get is hard to understand or confusing, you can:

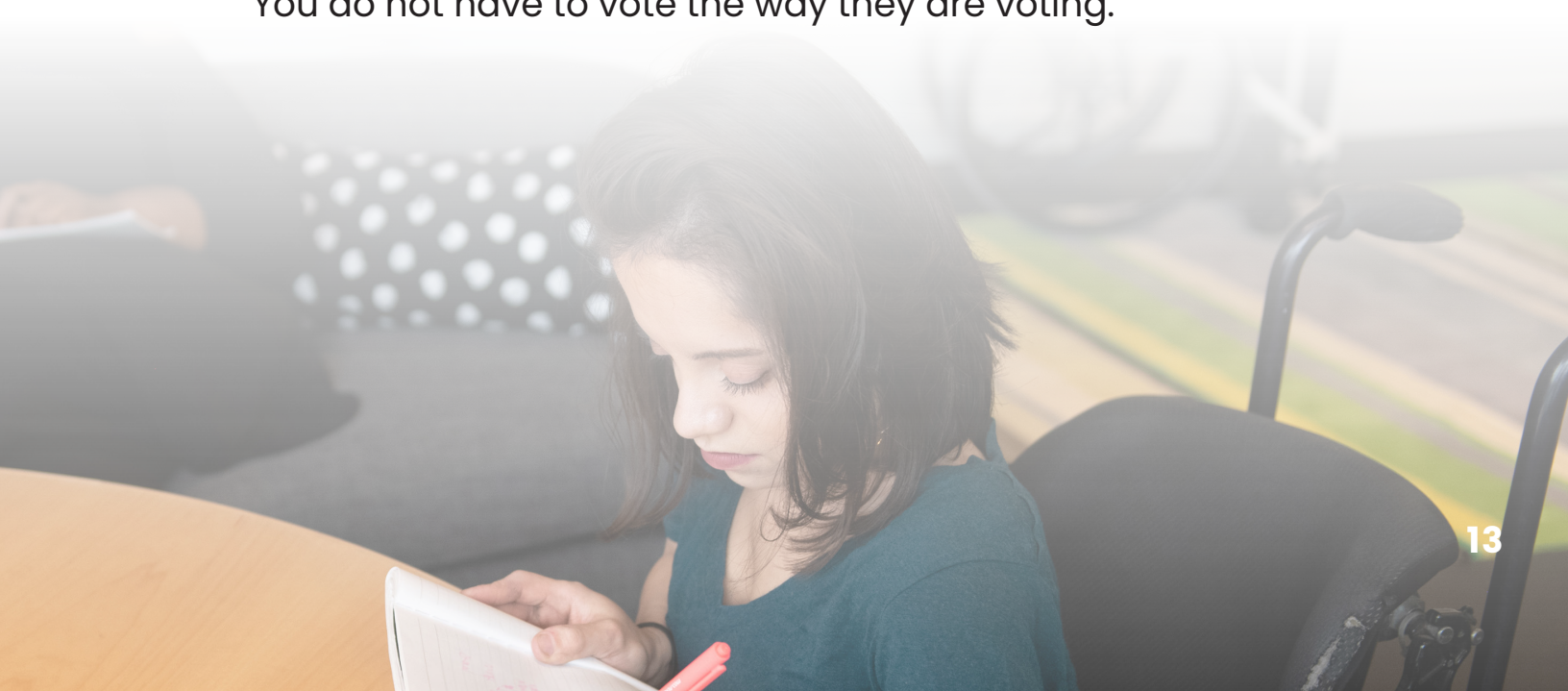
- Contact groups you trust and ask them to explain the issue to you or provide accessible information.

Try to contact groups that are nonpartisan.

- Ask a person you trust to explain the differences between candidates or issues to vote on.

This person may also share their opinion about which way people should vote.

You do not have to vote the way they are voting.





## How Does Voting On Election Day Work?

On Election Day, you will vote at your polling place.

### **Before you leave for your polling place:**

- Make sure to bring your government photo identification (ID).

This is a passport, driver's license, state ID, or ID from the election board.

Some states require this.

- Make sure you know how to get to your local polling place.
- Bring someone to support you if you want or need help.
- Bring any notes you want to help remember what candidates or issues you want to vote for.
- Do not wear clothing or buttons supporting your candidate to vote.

Some polling places do not allow people inside if they are wearing political clothing or buttons.

### **Outside your polling place:**

- There may be signs for each candidate.
- People may hand you information or try persuading you to vote one way or another.

You can talk to them or not.

Either way is okay.

- You do not have to tell anyone who you are voting for.

- You may also have to wait in line outside of the polling place.

Be prepared to wait.

You may have to wait even if the weather is bad.

Sometimes, polling places may be able to take the ballot to a person's car to complete.

### **Inside your polling place:**

- Do not talk about who you are voting for.
- Do not ask people who you should vote for.



## How Do I Vote at My Polling Place?

The polling place will have **poll workers**.

Poll workers are people who help people vote.

The poll worker will ask you to confirm your name and address.

They may ask to see your photo ID.

They will make sure you are registered to vote.

Make sure you register to vote before you go to a polling place.

Then, you will be handed a **ballot**.

A ballot is a form that we use to vote.

The ballot will list each thing you can vote for.

It will ask you to fill in the dot or select the candidate or issue you want to vote for.

The ballot may be hard to understand or fill out.

The ballot may be on a screen, or it may be on paper.

Voting machines show ballots on a screen.

Voting machines can read the ballot to you.

Voting machines can also let people who use Braille vote.

You will be given a private space to complete your ballot.

You have the right to ask for a private space that is accessible.

You can ask a friend or bring someone you trust with you to help you complete your ballot.

They can help you fill out your ballot.





They can help you understand what the ballot is saying.

They can help you read forms or use the voting machines.

But other people should not choose who you vote for.

That is your choice!

Once you have finished filling out your ballot, make sure it is counted.

You can tell a poll worker that you have finished voting.

You can ask the poll workers for help to make sure that your ballot is received.

After you leave your polling place, decide how much you want to share about your vote.

No one else has to know how you voted.

You can decide how much you want to share with other people.

You do not have to share your vote with anyone.





## **My Voting Rights Have Been Denied. What Should I Do?**

If you have the right to vote:

- You have the right to have an accessible polling place.
- You have the right to a private, accessible place to complete your ballot.
- You have the right to have someone help you complete and submit your ballot.

**If you think your voting rights have been denied, contact these groups.**

These groups can help you figure out what to do if your rights are denied.

- Call the voting rights hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687-8683).

They have lawyers who can help you.

They work year-round to help people to vote.

You can call them before Election Day, on Election Day, or afterwards.

You can call them with general questions about voting.

You can also call them after your rights have been denied.

They can also tell you how to make a complaint to your election office.

- Contact your local protection and advocacy organization.

These organizations provide legal assistance to people with disabilities.

There is one organization for each state and territory.

You can find your local protection and advocacy organization at [ndrn.org/about/ndrn-member-agencies](https://ndrn.org/about/ndrn-member-agencies).

You can call them after your rights have been denied.

They can help you make a complaint to your election office or figure out other steps to take.

- Contact your state or local election office at: [usa.gov/state-election-office](https://usa.gov/state-election-office).

You can call them after your rights have been denied.

They can tell you how to make a complaint if your rights are denied.

You can also contact many other groups that help people with disabilities.

These groups can help you figure out who you need to talk to.

Groups you may want to talk to are:


- The Arc
- Your case manager or state IDD agency
- Your local or state independent living center
- Your local or state self-advocacy group

## How Can I Help Other People Vote?

There are many things that you could do to help other people in your community vote.

- Share information about voting, issues, and candidates with other people that you know.
- Share information about voting with people with disabilities and self-advocate groups in your community.
- Share this Voting Guide you are reading with others in your community.
- Join your local REV UP coalition at [aapd.com/building-state-rev-up-disability-voting-coalitions/](http://aapd.com/building-state-rev-up-disability-voting-coalitions/).
- Hand out voter registration forms at self-advocate meetings.
- Reach out to groups in your community who want to help make sure people can vote.
- You can ask to volunteer with these organizations and help people vote.



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- Reach out to The Arc and other disability community organizations to see what you can do to help others vote.
  - Offer to help train people with disabilities about voting.
  - Reach out to your state IDD agency, election office, and disability community groups to help train people.
  - Volunteer at polling places or on campaigns.
  - Getting involved is a great way to make sure polling places are accessible.
  - Reach out to groups like The Arc to help advocate to get rid of laws that stop people with disabilities from voting.

## Where Can I Learn More About Voting?

There are many resources and groups who want to help people vote.

You can always reach out to The Arc if you need help.

You can contact us by email at [info@thearc.org](mailto:info@thearc.org).

You can also call us on the phone at 1-800-433-5255.

**Here are some other voting resources we think are very helpful:**

- The Arc's Election Center  
[thearc.org/registertovote](https://thearc.org/registertovote)
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network Your Vote Counts:  
A Self-Advocate's Guide to Voting in the US  
[autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/voting](https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/voting)
- Self Advocates Becoming Empowered  
GoVoter Project  
[sabeusa.org/govoter](https://sabeusa.org/govoter)
- American Association for People with Disabilities  
REV UP: Register, Educate, Vote, Use your Power  
[aapd.com/advocacy/voting](https://aapd.com/advocacy/voting)
- League of Women Voters Education Fund  
[vote411.org](https://vote411.org)