

HAVAcess

The election reform resource to help you address polling place access



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Access to Polling Places

HAVAcess, is Inclusion Solutions' free newsletter to help election officials implement the disability access provisions of the Help America Vote Act. Call us toll free at 1-866-232-5487 for free discussion of accessibility in your jurisdiction.

Federal Access After The 2004 Election -- and Next Steps

The 2004 election represented the first presidential election since HAVA -- and the first election with widespread tests of new voting technologies and new systems.

2005 will unquestionably be an important year as it relates to accessibility of the electoral process. Several factors will dominate federal accessibility initiatives for 2005 and beyond. Central to these will be initiatives regarding accessible voting machines and funding.

Most immediate is the January 1, 2006 HAVA-imposed requirement of having an accessible voting machine in each polling place. This explicit requirement demands that every polling location (not precinct) have a voting machine that is accessible to voters who are blind or visually impaired.

Closely related is the issue of accessible polling places. Many advocates understandably point out that a voting machine isn't truly accessible unless all voters can get to that machine. HAVA's original drafters did not address this issue -- thus whether this results in federal access standards or administrative

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From My Perspective...

Reflections on Access: November 2004
Below are comments from voters with disabilities about their experiences during the 2004 general election.

It was a totally different experience for me. This is how voting should go.
- *Darrel Price, who uses a wheelchair, commenting on helpful poll workers, improved accessibility, and an accessible booth at his polling site.*

We received a lot of enthusiastic response from people who voted for the first time."
- *Jim Dickson, president*

guidelines from the Election Assistance Commission remains to be seen.

Also at issue is funding. Early reports indicate that the proposed budget includes only minimal HAVA funding. To date, less than 25% of the amount authorized for polling place accessibility under Section 261 of HAVA has been appropriated. Many states have made up the shortfall with the addition of unrestricted HAVA funds, but improved federal funding of these provisions would go far to address these issues.

OTHER ARTICLES ON ACCESS

[*Polls Still Thwart Disabled Voters*](#)

[*Electionline Report: New Machines Allow More with Disabilities to Vote - If They Can Access the Polling Place*](#)

States: What Went Right, What Went Wrong, and What Now?

The November presidential election represented the first presidential election since HAVA as well as the first national election since portions of HAVA accessibility funding have been distributed to local election officials.

With respect to accessibility of polling places, results were mixed. Some states worked hard to implement substantive accessibility changes prior to this election, some states used the election as an opportunity to start their surveying process, and other states are still waiting as a result of administrative or other logistical challenges.

For example, Hawaii and Kansas saw major improvements for the 2004 election with access improvements purchased by and distributed by the state departments of elections. These states saw unprecedented levels of access during this election.

Other states saw significant improvements at polling places in place for the first time based on state and local initiatives. North Carolina and Illinois led the charge with massive statewide accessibility initiatives. Other states made such changes on a smaller scale,

of the American Association of People with Disabilities, reflecting on voters nationwide using new, accessible machines for the first time.

They moved my polling place to a more accessible location and I really appreciate that. I had no problems getting into the polling place for the first time. I hope that officials nationwide can fix or move all of the polling places -- and then get accessible machines so that I and others can vote independently.

- Margaret Holzer, Chicago advocate, reflecting on improved access.

I vote at a church and they have a power door, which I appreciate. But two things keep me from independence. First, the lift to get up the stairs at my polling place has small buttons and a door so that I can't use it myself. I'd like there to be a way to request assistance from an election officials with it. Also, I'd appreciate it if election officials could provide the right tools so that I can sign my name myself. A signature guide would allow me to sign in independently.

-Ted Gramboarini, advocate and entrepreneur, reflecting on the good and the bad

including Montana, Arizona, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

And some states, such as Indiana, Virginia, and Massachusetts, used the 2004 election as an ideal opportunity to survey polling places under the actual conditions of election day.

Despite the success stories, other states experienced frustration and lack of improvement to the level that many had expected. For example, only a small minority of Arkansas counties took advantage of grants available from the state for accessibility. The situation in California was even more frustrating. A large portion of HAVA funds have been frozen as a result of issues unrelated to polling place accessibility. Unfortunately, the Section 261 HAVA funds have also been frozen -- preventing any access changes from being made despite enthusiasm to do so both by advocates and local election officials. And in New York, despite a potential additional \$10 million commitment to accessibility, nothing has happened as a result of the state legislature's refusal to release the funds.

Nevertheless, exciting initiatives are underway in many states for 2005. Some officials are following up on 2004 work to finalize access improvement at outstanding inaccessible sites with a projected phase-out of remaining inaccessible locations and the inclusion of additional accessibility tools such as magnifiers and signature templates at all sites.

Some states are ramping up work as never before. Kentucky is holding trainings sponsored by the Kentucky Disabilities Coalition throughout December at which time local officials will be trained on surveying sites. Surveys will be conducted through early 2005 and improvements will be made after that time. Likewise, Missouri has finished many of their surveys and is now moving into the next stages of its accessibility initiative.

With continued funding, HAVA's January 1, 2006 accessible machine requirement, additional exciting state and local initiatives, and many officials better able to address this

at his polling place.

By 2006 hopefully no matter what disability you may suffer from you'll be able to vote no matter where you live. It's important because its nice to be able to get out there and do it yourself. Anyone can absentee vote but it makes a big difference for yoruself when you are part of the process.
- *James Mullen, paralyzed police officer and CBS-2 Chicago reporter in increased accessibility in Illinois*

Inclusion Solutions: Thank You!

The last few months have been hectic here at Inclusion Solutions as I'm sure they have been for many of you. We wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you to all of our customers and let everyone know that we look forward to working with all of you in the future.

Four years ago, Inclusion Solutions was a start-up company with little understanding of the election industry. Today, we've learned so much from all of you, including the special challenges that you face as election officials.

It has been a privilege to work with election officials from Maine to Hawaii and everyone in between solving your accessibility issues. For those of you with whom we have not worked, we look forward to talking with you now that the election is over and perhaps you have more time to address these important access issues. It's not too late to get purchases in before the end of 2004. We are also looking to develop new

important initiative in a non-election year, 2005 should be a crucial year for ensuring the accessibility of the electoral process.

Two Illinois Success Stories

Illinois has focused extensively on polling place accessibility and the media took notice of these efforts. Reprinted below is a piece from the Chicago Tribune on accessibility efforts in Chicago during the last election. The link at the bottom will take you to a video piece on accessibility improvements in Chicago and Cook County during the 2004 general election that demonstrates accessibility solutions in place.

Barriers still confront some disabled voters

By Trine Tsouderos, Tribune staff reporter, Published November 5, 2004

At his polling place on the Near South Side, Darrell Price, who uses a wheelchair, was pleasantly surprised to find poll workers helpful Tuesday--and the accessible voting booth working.

"It was a totally different experience for me," said Price, 37, who had to crawl down a flight of steps during the spring primary, only to find the booth he needed broken. "This is how it should go."

But in Elmwood Park, Dawn Ramsey, who is visually impaired, said she spent 30 minutes trying to convince a skeptical poll worker that she needed her mother's help in the voting booth.

"It was awful," said Ramsey, 26, who eventually was allowed to cast her vote for John Kerry with her mother's help.

The news Tuesday was good and bad for disability organizations working on a national effort to get eligible disabled voters registered and to the polls, and to ensure that those polls were accessible to all.

Disabled voters turned out in record numbers but still encountered barriers at polling places, although those problems appeared to be fewer than in past elections, officials said.

"It was greatly improved over the primary," said Karen Ward, senior counsel for Chicago-based Equip for Equality, which helped train election judges in Chicago and sent staffers to 300 polling places Tuesday to monitor them for accessibility.

But, Ward said, "We should be further along than we are now, in 2004."

With a goal of increasing turnout on Election Day by 1 million new disabled voters, disability organizations across the U.S. worked phone banks, sent out mailings, held rallies and sponsored candidate forums.

In Illinois, which had a goal of sending 10,000 new disabled voters to the polls, organizations reached an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 disabled residents in recent months, said Ann Ford, executive director of the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living, who is spearheading the state campaign.

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- Interior access kits and associated products such as magnifiers and signature templates
- Survey Tools
- Accessible voting booths.

NEW PRODUCTS

- *Deaf/Hard of Hearing Cards: Laminated card with common election day questions for election judges to point to better communicate with Deaf/Hard of Hearing voters.*
- *New Signature Templates with additional ovals to allow voters to better use optical scan ballots>*
- *Training Video: Universal seven-minute training video for election judges on how to interact with voters with disabilities*
- *New Cost-Effective Hard Matting for unpaved lots*

Just how many showed up won't be known for months as voter data is analyzed, Ford said.

"We know they were there in large numbers," she said, noting that 100 disabled residents showed up for a party Tuesday night in Springfield to celebrate the act of voting. "There was this sense of excitement. There was this sense of empowerment."

Nationally, an estimated 400,000 new disabled voters were registered, though hard data won't be available for several months, said Jim Dickson, vice president of governmental affairs for the Washington-based American Association of People With Disabilities, which is coordinating the national campaign.

Anecdotally, Dickson said he heard--and witnessed himself--reports of people finding fellow disabled voters waiting in line at the polls.

"That is something I have never heard or seen before," he said. "So that's encouraging."

The potential clout of the disabled, who polls say tend to favor Democratic candidates, is apparent in the 2000 census, which showed that 20 percent of the U.S. population has some form of disability.

Even so, the disabled are at least 15 percent less likely to vote, according to a 1999 study for the Bureau of Economic Research and other organizations.

In 2000 an estimated 42 percent of eligible disabled voters cast ballots in Illinois, compared with 52.8 percent of all eligible voters, studies show.

Advocates say one crucial turnoff is that polling places are often inaccessible, an issue that has become a focus of the disability organizations' campaign and one aided by an infusion of federal money thanks to the Help America Vote Act of 2002.

Federal and Illinois laws require polling places to be accessible to the disabled except in emergencies or if a suitable building isn't available.

In Cook County, the clerk's office spent part of a \$175,000 grant to improve access to polling sites, said Scott Burnham, spokesman for Clerk David Orr.

The office offered training for election judges, provided information for disabled voters and bought 140 handicapped-parking signs, 29 ramps, 350 feet of mats to smooth terrain for voters in wheelchairs and walkers, and 25 bells to get the attention of poll workers, he said.

In Chicago, the Board of Election Commissioners set aside and marked two parking spaces for disabled voters at all 1,865 polling sites, specially trained most of its 14,000 election judges and installed ramps at 125 polling places, said spokesman Tom Leach.

That still leaves about 17 percent of the city's polling sites inaccessible, Leach said.

"We are doing a better job at it," he said.

Nationally, complaints about polling places swamped the American Association of People With Disabilities' hot line,

All our [products](#) are portable and owned by you, the election official and are consistent with Section 261 of HAVA. We can also help with grant applications.

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The next issue will be the first of 2005 and will start to talk about upcoming issues of accessibility as well as the prospects for polling place accessibility in conjunction with HAVA's January 1, 2006 requirement of accessible machines.

Plus: Discussion of the "Automark" system to make optical scan voting systems

Dickson said.

In one case, a Cleveland man with a nearly empty oxygen tank wasn't allowed to go to the front of the line, he said. In another, disabled residents said they were refused chairs to rest on while they waited to vote. Other callers told of poll workers saying they were too busy to deal with curbside voting, a common way for the disabled to vote at inaccessible polling sites.

The campaign will continue to improve accessibility at the polls and turn the stream of disabled voters into a flood, Dickson said.

Ford already has her sights on Illinois municipal elections in the spring. "We aren't taking a vacation or anything," she said.

And by 2008, she said, "people with disabilities will be recognized as a major voting group, as a group that the candidates want to get their message to, like the soccer moms."

[CBS-2 Chicago Video on Accessible Polling Places](#)

accessible.

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