

HAVAccess

The election reform resource to help you address polling place access

 inclusion-solutions

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Access

HAVAccess is Inclusion Solutions' free newsletter to help election officials implement the disability access provisions of the Help America Vote Act. Please call at 1-866-232-5487 to discuss accessibility in your jurisdiction.

Friday, October 20, 2006 is the last day to place orders to guarantee delivery before election day.

The November 7, 2006 general election is approaching fast. Accessibility improvements have taken place in election jurisdictions throughout the United States. But the work isn't done.

Originally, HAVA's wording suggested that an earlier date in 2006 -- either January 1, 2006 or the first primary election were to be deadlines for accessibility. Other interpretations were that changes had to be made by the upcoming general election. But the reality is that the process is an ongoing one -- access is decidedly improved nationwide, but there is still work to do in many states and territories.

The framers of the Americans With Disabilities Act point to a continuing obligation to continue to increase accessibility -- an obligation that also applies to elections.

2007 funding for the HHS/EAID program still remains likely under bill [HR 5647, the Departments of Labor, Health, Human Services and Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Act](#) which provides that "\$15,720,000 shall be for activities authorize by the Help America Vote Act of 2002, of which \$10,890,000 shall be for payments to States to promote access for voters with disabilities, and of which \$4,830,000 shall be for payments to States for protection and advocacy systems for voters with disabilities..." Once again, local officials and advocates should continue to pressure Congress to ensure that this funding bill is enacted.

Other Developments on Access.

California: [VotePad Files Claim Against California Secretary of State](#); See also: [Secretary of State Guide for Voters With Disabilities](#).

Mississippi: [Disabled voters can try out new machines: County offers alternative to lever-based voting booths](#).

Maine: [Two towns forced to change voting sites.](#)

Pennsylvania: [Area blind and voting booths: Alone at last](#).

New York: [Accessible ballot marking device available; Advocates for disabled decry voting appointments. Being asked to call ahead is a barrier, some say.](#)

Connecticut: [Vote by phone system due for disabled](#).

National: [National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems Position on Voting Machines and Individuals with Dexterity Disabilities](#).

Special Note: Having Trouble Getting HAVAccess Some election officials have reported that they are not getting issues of HAVAccess -- this is a result of increasingly necessary spam filters. To ensure that you and your colleagues continue to receive future issues, please forward the following request to your Email Service Provider: "Please White List the following IPs: SMTP Server IP: 69.28.223.130-->137 using domain postsnet.com or

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From My Perspective...

by Cliff Perez

Cliff Perez is a systems advocate with the [Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley \(ILCHV\)](#). He is one of New York's leading advocates to ensure accessibility of elections.

On September 12, 2006 I voted - on my own - for the first time in my life! Voting, the most powerful tool in a democracy is, at best, taken for granted and at worst, is viewed as ineffectual. It is due to this misguided perception, that too many of our citizens forgo their most powerful catalyst for change, in this great Democratic Republic of ours.

As a person who has been severely visually impaired from birth, I have not - until now, due to the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) - had the pleasure or privilege of voting privately and independently. Prior to this primary, I would have to bring someone I could trust to come with me into the voting booth so they could read the necessary information in order for me to exercise my obligation as a concerned citizen. Fortunately for me, I have been blest with a wonderful, caring and absolutely understanding person - my wife - who has been there for me for the past twenty-six years. Although she has reliably assisted me every time I have had to vote, it is difficult for me to truly express to you the joy of finally voting on my own.

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Last Second Accessibility Upgrades?

With the general election coming up within a matter of weeks, the time has passed to make major renovations to make facilities accessible. But that doesn't mean that there aren't last-minute things to do to make your sites more accessible. Below are some easy and inexpensive ways to ensure your sites are available to all voters.

Parking: Parking can be inexpensively created with temporary signs and cones – which are either commercially available or you may be able to get them from the local highway department. Cones should be used to create not only a parking space but also an adjacent access aisle for a voter to unload.

Big Steps: If there are major steps into the location, look around for another entryway that can be used such as a garage/fire door or side entrance. See the second article for more tips on using alternative entrances.

Doors and entryways: Inaccessible door hardware can be easily solved. A round doorknob can be made accessible with a \$12 door grip retrofit that stretches over the knob. And "thumb latch" doors which require tight grasping can be made into accessible "loop handles" by merely taping down the latch with duct tape. Heavy doors can be solved sometimes by adjusting door pressure. Or, in other cases, the interior door may be accessible and lighter. In that case, merely prop open the outside door and use the interior accessible one for entry.

Signage: Signage directing voters to the accessible entrance and the accessible route indoors is crucial. Whether commercially available signs or hand-drawn arrows on posterboard, proper signage goes a long way to make sites accessible.

Auxiliary Accessible Voting Areas: Where the interior of a polling site is inaccessible – such as up or down stairs, a separate auxiliary voting area can be created in an accessible part of the building. The [*U.S. DOJ ADA Checklist for Polling Places*](#) suggests "if the living room of a private home used for voting is up several steps, perhaps the garage may be accessible when entered from the driveway. Or, if a church's basement is used as a polling place and it is not accessible, perhaps one of the ground floor rooms could be used as the accessible voting area." When employing this strategy, be sure that the accessible side area is staffed or has a means for voters to request assistance.

Solving the Unsolvable: There may remain certain locations that simply cannot be addressed for this election day because they have large steps or other barriers. Be sure that voters arriving at this location understand your access plan. Nothing is worse than a voter arriving at an inaccessible location and not knowing what to do next. If sites cannot be solved, be sure to have a plan in place.

As an advocate for and with persons with disabilities for the past twenty years, I have been involved in a variety of measures designed to enhance the lives of Americans with disabilities. As such, I have been involved with HAVA implementation in New York from the very beginning. Unfortunately, the process of HAVA implementation in our state has not paved the way for an effective transition toward maximizing the ability of all citizens to participate in the voting process. As a result of HAVA, we finally have the opportunity to ensure that all citizens, including citizens with disabilities, illiteracy and citizens speaking other languages, can fully take advantage of a process that has been denied to such individuals for over 200 years.

Due to a variety of unexplainable reasons, the State of New York failed to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the passage of HAVA. As a result of this failure - beginning with our Legislature and then the New York State Board of Elections (NYSBE) - the counties were burdened with the responsibility of purchasing accessible voting systems with very little guidance and assistance by the NYSBE. However most of our counties still managed to carry out their obligations of purchasing and implementing procedures, which provided an opportunity for many citizens - including those of us with disabilities - to vote for the first time in our lives, privately and independently.

Columbia County performed a proactive measure regarding the usage of their newly purchased Electronic Voting System, by conducting a demonstration and test run prior to the Primary on September 12, 2006. Members of the community were invited to try out the new system and provide feedback to the local Board of Election Officials. However, the same could not be said for Rensselaer, Albany and Schenectady counties. In Rensselaer, my County of residence, very little information was provided to the community from the Board of Election as to what they were going to do to implement HAVA. Fortunately, a dialogue was established with them after I voted. Although the voting system chosen by Rensselaer County was not the best choice, I am hoping that after establishing a dialogue with them we will work together to ensure a better choice for the future. Albany County indicated that they publicized in the

Options, depending on your state, may include assistance up a too-steep ramp, curbside voting at the location, an accessible voting shelter placed outside, or having paratransit services available for the voter to take him or her to an accessible central location (such as the main election office.)

Also, at any inaccessible location, be sure to provide voters with disabilities with a means to request alternative service such as bringing ballots out which has been at least implicitly authorized by the U.S. DOJ in an [advisory letter to Mississippi](#).

Voters with disabilities – like all voters – have varying desires. Absentee voting, for example, may appeal to some, but for others, there is no substitute for voting at their precinct on election day. Be sure to provide as many options as possible when addressing access, even with these last minute tips.

Summary: Polling Location Types (and Solutions)

The past few issues of HAVAccess have highlighted the different accessibility challenges posed by several categories of buildings used as polling places – churches, schools, private facilities/homes and other locations. This article will review these locations and talk about a few other site types.

Fire Stations and Garages

Two common facilities that weren't previously mentioned and which deserve discussion are fire houses and county garages. These facilities commonly do not have accessible parking signs and spaces as they are not visited by the public. Thus election officials can select whether to install permanent parking (and paint the lots) or set up temporary parking with cones for election day only depending on the configuration.

Fire stations and garages face many of the same problems as other facilities such as heavy doors, steps, narrow entries, etc. But they have one major advantage for access – large bay doors that can be opened. These garage doors can allow a wheelchair to enter easily as they are paved and wide enough for a truck. But in most locations in November, poor weather means these doors cannot be left open. The BallotCall alert system can solve this when placed outside the heavy door, steps, or other access barrier and allows the voter a dignified request that the accessible garage doors be opened.

Churches

Churches and other religious buildings are common facilities for polling locations. Centrally located, underused on weekdays, and containing large common rooms, they can be excellent locations. But because they are private facilities not controlled by election officials, as well as the fact that these locations are exempt from the requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act any time but election day, these sites pose special problems for access.

Common problems at churches include parking. Many lots are painted but do not have upright signs. Other issues include

paper and on television however, we were unable to find anyone who could verify this fact. Columbia and Rensselaer counties provided wheelchair accessible transportation to the polling site with the accessible voting machine but, much more needs to be done to publicize this service for the upcoming general election.

The most important point in all of this is to maximize voter participation within the voting process. Voting - in its pure nature - is the most equalizing force or catalyst for change. Regardless of who you are or your status in society, your individual vote is no more or less powerful than anyone else's. When combined within a group/coalition the dimensions of the singular vote take on a whole new perspective that will not be denied! If you ever needed to know if voting makes a difference all you have to do is look at what happened in Florida with the Presidential election. If the vote did not matter, the situation in Florida would not have been such a big deal - but it was. The other factor, which contributes to the power of the vote, is the amount of money spent by those wishing to obtain political office. Would you spend money on something that does not matter? So I ask you once again, do you vote? I know I do.

Inclusion Solutions: Your Solution for November and Beyond

Inclusion Solutions carries over [110 products](#) to solve polling place access issues and is the nation's leader on this part of HAVA.

OCTOBER 20, 2006 IS THE LAST DAY TO PLACE ORDERS TO GUARANTEE DELIVERY BEFORE NOVEMBER 7, 2006

Inclusion Solutions is the nation's leader on election access. We have now worked with officials in 50 states and territories and we continue to come up with even more and *the only vendor in this area with attorneys, ADA experts, and people with disabilities on staff to ensure dignified solutions.*

Check out our exciting new matting solution -- [BallotDeck](#) for unpaved lots. This innovative product snaps together and allows wheelchairs to cross gravel, grass, sand or mud lots.

unpaved lots, heavy doors, and interior barriers such as voting in an inaccessible basement.

Many states have determined that public HAVA funding cannot be used for permanent changes on private facilities such as churches. Thus temporary accessibility solutions that can be brought out on election day are particularly appropriate for use at churches. Another useful solution at churches is to create an accessible alternative voting area in an entry foyer for voters with disabilities if access to the main voting room cannot be provided.

Private Facilities and Homes

Private facilities, businesses, and homes are used nationwide as polling places and also pose challenges. Just as with churches, some private facilities may be exempt from ADA accessibility requirements when not in use for elections. But districting, availability, or rural locations may leave election officials with no choice but to use them. Complicating matters, there is reluctance to spend public monies on private facilities – especially private clubs, homes, or for-profit businesses.

Homes and private facilities may include multiple steps to the front door, and lack of accessible parking spaces. Residential doors can be heavy and/or have inaccessible door hardware.

The General Accounting Office report on polling place access found these locations among the most inaccessible in the country -- 93% of private homes and 78% of "other" facilities had at least one barrier.

Just as with churches, state mandates to prohibit HAVA funding for permanent changes on private facilities are common, and temporary accessibility solutions remain in many cases the most viable option.

Schools

While schools are among the most common polling locations both access and preferred solutions vary widely. Sites located in private schools can present challenges similar to churches and may not be covered under accessibility codes if part of a religious organization.

Public schools used as polling places present different concerns. In theory, public schools should already be accessible to people with disabilities as the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act mandated. But the reality is different – and many locations still do not meet standards either because of the facility itself or where in the school the polling place is located.

Some schools – especially older ones -- have barriers that prevent any individuals with disabilities from entering into the location. For such buildings, permanent changes such as ramps, automated doors, or the permanent BigBell alert system are ideal alterations that can make the facility accessible every day of the year.

Unsure about whether to use BallotDeck, VersaMat (Hard Matting), or Mobi-Mat (Superlight mesh matting) for your unpaved parking lot? Check out our [Matting Comparison Sheet](#).

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Indoor/outdoor voting booths to provide voters with disabilities privacy and independence in any environment.

[Wider Ramps](#) built to stricter California and other state codes.

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Voting Machine Sanitary

Headphone Covers. We carry disposable headphone covers. Consider at least 10 headcovers for each of your ADA-compliant voting machines. [Page 14](#)

Complete Accessibility Kits.

Whether you want an affordable low-cost alternative, a complete access kit, or a deluxe, integrated kit designed for a vote center, we carry complete packages of interior accessibility items to promote "Privacy and Independence" for voters with disabilities. See [page 15 of our new catalog](#).

Need Help Surveying Sites? We carry survey tools from the basic to the deluxe as well as manuals and videos on "how to". Check out the options on [pages 2-3](#) Or check out our [Free Help Going Through Survey Results](#). Call us toll free -- we have analyzed survey results and come up with non-binding proposals for hundreds of jurisdictions nationwide.

Other Materials

[Braille and Alternative Format Materials](#).
[1:12 Ramp Chart](#).

We carry solutions for all accessibility issues in your polling places from parking lots, to steps, to door hardware, to inside of the polling place.

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.

But other schools that may be accessible to students may still pose challenges to voters based upon the election-day configuration. For example, voting may be in a side or rear gymnasium while the accessible parking is at the front door. In these cases, the area used for voting should also be made independently accessible even if it means creating a second temporary election-day parking area near the voting location. In other cases, voting may take place in an inaccessible location – such as on an auditorium stage. This can be resolved by appropriate signage or alternative accessible voting areas.

A final challenge in schools occurs when security issues conflict with accessibility. Some school accessible side entrances must remain locked for security reasons. Stationing an official outside the door or using the BallotCall alert system can allow voters approaching this alternative entrance to request that it be opened.

Other Locations and Final Thoughts

As discussed last issue, not all locations fit into these categories. Locations that are used as polling sites range from courthouses to armories to animal shelters to the floor of the Grand Canyon. Some of these sites simply cannot be made accessible and require creative solutions and alternative service. Others can be addressed using some of the same principles for the locations set forth above. What is the lesson from reviewing all of these location types? It is that there is no single solution for any location. To fully address polling place access, sites must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and each location requires a different set of solutions. Check out the [Inclusion Solutions Catalog](#) for solutions for all types of locations.

Call us toll free at 1-866-232-5487, or Email elections@inclusionsolutions.com

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