

People with Disabilities in Nevada

There are an estimated 775,830 adults in Nevada who have a disability. This is equal to 1 in 3 or 32% of Nevada's population.

If you take a look around at the other people on this Committee, that's roughly 4 people. A little over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million people can potentially be impacted by a change to the current voting laws.

In the 2020 election, roughly 59.7% of people with disabilities in our state exercised their right to vote, (Schur & Kruse, 2021).

Nationally, about one in nine voters with disabilities encountered difficulties voting in 2020. This is double the rate of people without disabilities. Among people with disabilities who voted in person, 18% reported difficulties, compared to 10% of people without disabilities.

Accessibility

Accessibility involves much more than providing ramps, it is the key element of inclusion and the baseline of equal service. Accessibility refers to the design of environments, products, and services that facilitate access for people with disabilities to the same level of access, independence, and **privacy** as anyone else. Ensuring effective access to information and services isn't only about meeting legal requirements or satisfying a policy checklist – it is about constantly striving to expand meaningful participation for all.

Universal accessibility creates a world that does not separate anyone based on their abilities. The fundamental problem is that voters with disabilities are being offered a "separate but equal" approach to voting. And as such "separate" is *not* equal.

So what does this mean for people with disabilities when it comes time to vote? Providing equal access to all individuals with disabilities is the key element of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992 (ADA). The ADA provides a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities, requiring State and local governments communicate as effectively with people who have disabilities as someone without. When you create a universal polling place, you must design it in such a way that people with disabilities can independently vote in privacy. This is the foundation to the freedoms in America, as stated in the 1st and 14th Amendments.

We must address the topic of **voting access**.

When people with disabilities vote in person: they are supposed to be provided options such as an ADA voting machine. However, when a voting place has a separate accessible voting machine, it's not used as frequently as the primary method of voting. Therefore, poll workers don't spend as much time using the accessible voting equipment. As a result of this minimal use, poll workers often forget how to set up the equipment and how to instruct someone with a disability how to use it, if they have been trained on its use at all. Wait times to use the ADA machines can be extensive, leading many people to choose not to vote at all. Other times leads to individuals with disabilities using the non-ADA machines. In order to use these machines, many people with disabilities may need assistance in reading the ballot and entering in their vote. The experience is often that the representatives assisting them are not conscious of their volume and they read the ballot and answers loud enough for others to hear. Many in person voting practices currently promote the removal of access, independence, and **privacy**.

When people with disabilities vote by mail: many people with disabilities have expressed frustration when trying to vote by mail. Paper ballots can often not be read by screen readers and thus the person may need assistance in reading their options and filling in their choices. As many people with disabilities take pride in their independence, this can create a barrier to those wishing to vote on their own privately. Those needing to use touch screen in order to select their choices, now have to rely on someone else to assist them in filling out their ballot.

Benefits of electronic voting for people with disabilities: As I've discussed already today, access, independence, and privacy are vital to protecting the rights of people with disabilities when it comes to the right to vote. When working ADA Accessible machines and those that provide language access are provided at polling places and staff is fully trained on how to assist, people with varying disabilities are able to vote independently and privately. While Federal law may dictate many decisions, the Council recommends that you to promote equal access to services and environments by encouraging the adoption of universal design principles and implementing accessible, inclusive practices into all aspects of public engagement, specifically voting.

References:

(Schur & Kruse, 2021) Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations Report, through the Election Assistance Commission Study on Disability and Voting Accessibility in the 2020 Elections

If you have any questions, please contact our office.

Thank you,

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