
Providing Assistance

Voters with Disabilities

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) contained landmark provisions requiring the secure, private and independent casting of ballots for voters with disabilities. Since then, states have made significant efforts to eliminate barriers and close the voter registration and voter participation gaps that exist between voters with disabilities and voters without disabilities. However, obstacles still exist for voters with disabilities and additional progress is needed to realize the true promise of HAVA.

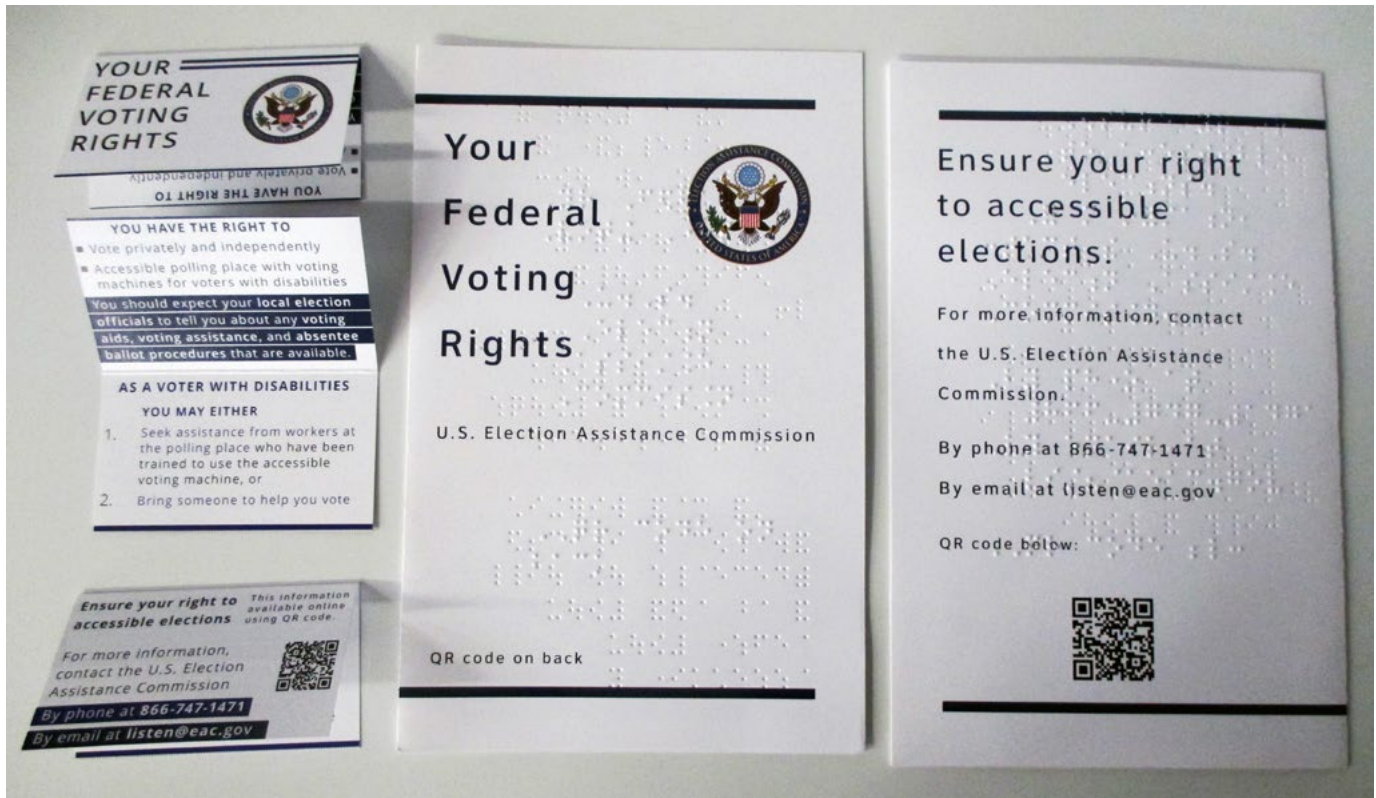
Today, more than 35 million Americans with disabilities are eligible to vote in the United States, accounting for roughly one-sixth of the total electorate. This ever-growing population of voters also faces educational, cultural and political barriers that can make participating in elections difficult. Since our establishment, the EAC has worked to expand access, regardless of a voter's abilities, by providing resources, promoting best practices, educating voters with disabilities about their

“Ensuring the rights of voters with disabilities isn’t a choice, nor is it a partisan issue. It’s the law. We can never forget that as we work to improve elections.”

-Joint op-ed from Commissioners Hicks and McCormick published on the 28th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act

rights, and testing and certifying voting systems to ensure they are both secure and accessible to all.

In 2018, the EAC hosted public forums to gather feedback from voters with disabilities about challenges they can face when casting a ballot. In June, Chairman Thomas Hicks and Vice Chair Christy McCormick conducted a town hall discussion with voters with disabilities and advocates from across America at the annual National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) conference. During this event, participants shared their voting experiences and offered suggestions for improvement. EAC Commissioners then shared this valuable feedback with election officials and continued their communication with voters with disabilities through the 2018 midterm election.



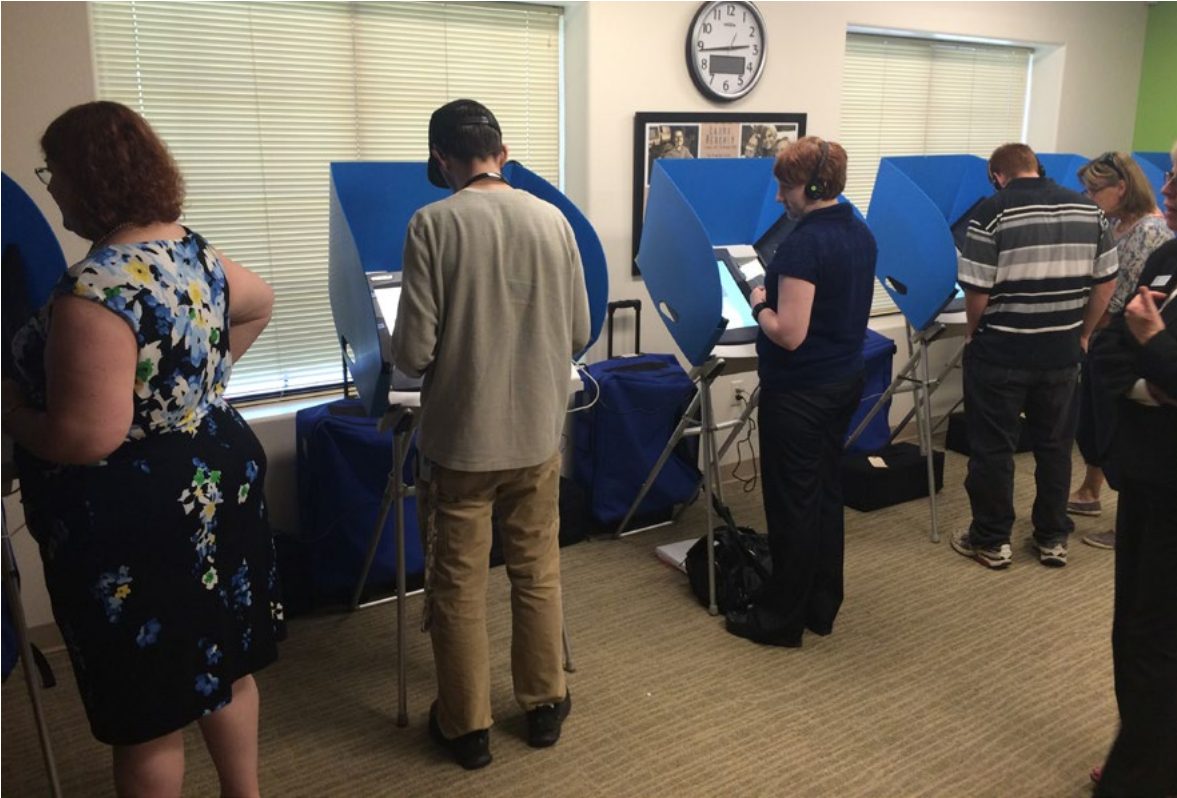
Since 2016, the EAC has distributed more than 20,000 federal voting rights cards in Braille, large print and plain language in order to ensure voters with disabilities are educated about their rights.

While there is no one solution that can be applied across the thousands of jurisdictions that comprise America's decentralized election system, there are common threads in how best to serve voters with disabilities. The EAC elevates best practices which can serve as exemplary models to election officials, such as technological improvements, better training for election workers, ensuring there are multiple options which accommodate the diversity of disabilities and regular engagement with voters with disabilities.

The EAC also ensures voters are educated about their rights. The EAC has distributed more than 20,000 federal voting rights cards in Braille, large print and plain language to voters with disabilities, advocacy organizations, and

election officials across the United States since 2016. EAC Commissioners stress the need to find election solutions that will both increase security and expand access in Congressional testimony, meetings with state and local election officials, public appearances and public articles. The EAC also promotes best practices throughout the year with voter outreach, updated materials and online campaigns.

While jurisdictions have made advances in providing access to voters with disabilities since the passage of HAVA, more work needs to be done to meet the promise of private and independent voting for all. Moving forward, election officials should be continuously reminded to do all they can to ensure accessibility at every point in the voting process.



The EAC composes and promotes “case studies” of best practices that can serve as exemplary models for election officials. In 2018, several of these features focused on how to better assist voters with access needs. Contra Costa County, California, for example, provided specialized training to its election workers, placing them in the shoes of voters who need assistance to give them a new perspective and providing real-life examples of situations that can occur at a polling place on Election Day. Other jurisdictions, such as El Paso County, Colorado, have partnered with disability rights groups and resource centers to create universally accessible polling places. By seeking out partners and building relationships within the community, election officials can benefit from additional expertise and make the most of their often-limited resources.