



U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
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Committee on House Administration, Subcommittee on Elections
Voting in America: The Potential for Polling Place Quality and Restrictions on
Opportunities to Vote to Interfere with Free and Fair Access to the Ballot

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United States Election Assistance Commission (EAC)
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Good morning Chairman Butterfield, Ranking Member Steil, and members of the Subcommittee on Elections. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you this morning regarding the 2020 elections and the work of the United States Election Assistance Commission (EAC). Established in 2002 under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), the EAC is a bipartisan agency focused on election administration and supporting election officials across the country. This vital mission includes offering guidance to improve polling place quality and accessibility for those who need additional assistance, ensuring that our voting systems are able to be used privately and independently by voters with disabilities, and that procedures are in place to ensure equal access to all voting Americans.

During the 2020 elections, the EAC responded immediately to complications caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We worked quickly in partnership with our federal and state partners through the Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and Sector Coordinating Council's Joint COVID Working Group to help local election officials provide for the safety of their voters as Americans headed to polling places in a pandemic. These officials often adapted existing procedures to provide increased options for mail and absentee voting and even drive by voting.

The recent increase in EAC operational funding as well as grants funding for distribution to states made this essential assistance possible. It is important to note that many states utilized [grants](#) to enhance polling place access and availability during the pandemic – vote centers and supersize polling places and additional days and hours of early voting to reduce the congestion on Election Day. On behalf of my fellow Commissioners and EAC personnel, we truly appreciate your support and the attention you pay to our mission, but the EAC aspires to do more.

This spring, the EAC created a separate Clearinghouse department and recruited a team of subject matter experts to join the agency. Through this effort we have onboarded three leading election administrators to join EAC staff. With nearly 40 years of combined elections experience, these award-winning professionals have pioneered election audits, implemented creative ways to educate voters, and garnered the respect of fellow election administrators nationwide. The EAC also established a new position focused solely on accessibility. This subject matter expert is devoted exclusively to ensuring election officials have the resources and

information they need to serve the millions of voters with disabilities in our country. This work will be done through providing targeted materials on expanding accessibility in all aspects of the voting process, trainings, and technical assistance to election officials and voting system manufacturers, launching an accessibility working group to ensure accessibility permeates the culture and work products of the EAC, and enhanced outreach to leaders in the disability community. The addition of the Clearinghouse division will allow our agency to further address the important topics that we are discussing today.

Additionally, we are currently launching a new advisory board comprised of two local election officials from all 50 states to provide advice and recommendations to the EAC in carrying out our mission under HAVA. Their feedback will prove critical in ensuring that the EAC is producing timely, responsive, and useful information to help election officials address the numerous challenges they face. Together, the EAC and state and local election officials will continue to innovate, safeguard the integrity of our nation's elections, and instill public confidence in election outcomes.

Today's hearing addresses polling place quality and potential barriers to voting access. While we have not yet received all data measurements from the election, a recent [U.S. Vote Foundation survey](#) found that 89% of respondents indicated they were satisfied with their overall 2020 voting experience. This represents an improvement over the 2016 satisfaction rate of 76%. Moreover, voters who cast their ballots in-person at a polling place, reported over 92% satisfaction in 2020. This is in line with polling from the 2016 Survey of the Performance of American Elections, where 95% of respondents said the performance of poll workers was "excellent" or "very good." In 2016, lines were shorter than they were in 2012, with 74% of voters waiting less than 10 minutes and 18% waiting between 10-30 minutes. That trend continues to move in the right direction. There was a similar positive opinion of polling place management with 82% of respondents saying things were "run well" at the polling place and 16% say things were run "ok."

Election officials are truly public servants who prioritize customer service to voters. This is an impressive accomplishment given the additional burdens created by COVID-19 and the numerous last-minute changes that the pandemic necessitated for election offices across the country. State and local election officials deserve high praise for their efforts.

In addition, the EAC recently released results from a [comprehensive study](#) on accessibility for voters with disabilities in the 2020 election, conducted in collaboration with Rutgers University. As evidenced in the study, many improvements were made in 2020 to assist voters with access needs. The number of persons with disabilities who encountered voting barriers at the polls is 18%, which represents a significant improvement from 30% in a similar 2012 study. Accessibility gaps do persist: voters with disabilities are still much more likely to encounter difficulties than those without disabilities. It is essential that the EAC continues to analyze these outcomes and offer potential solutions.

As a former state election official in both Virginia and Florida, I know one size does not fit all when it comes to addressing voters' needs. From polling place locations to the number of sites,

local officials are responsible for allocating resources based on the varying needs of their jurisdictions and the procedures governing them. While local governing bodies provide the resources and budgets for elections, local election officials are constantly reviewing their polling places to meet accessibility standards, identifying new polling places to better meet community needs, determining whether the polling places are in strategic locations to facilitate the vote of population centers, and deciding whether locations are large enough to efficiently process voters in high turnout elections. Election officials require the ability to act nimbly to meet the needs of their local population. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of this flexibility, as election officials had to make quick decisions such as moving polling locations to larger facilities that allowed voters to better maintain social distancing or consolidating locations to account for a decrease in the number of poll workers. Other jurisdictions developed new procedures for a shift to larger scale of mail ballots to be printed, mailed, and returned.

Data from our research and survey efforts have made apparent the popularity and use of early voting options. The option can reduce wait lines on Election Day and offer voters flexibility on how and when they cast their ballot. Early voting may also provide the opportunity for election officials to select their best and most accessible voting locations for that time period, enabling voters with disabilities the opportunity to cast a ballot at a preferred location. At the EAC, we work to support these efforts and provide assistance where needed. In 2020, we expanded our best practices resources to assist election officials with early in-person voting and mail-in ballots to reduce polling place lines and crowding in response to the pandemic.

Without a sufficient number of well-trained poll workers, polling places, no matter how numerous and accessible, would be of no value. Facing an unprecedented poll worker recruitment challenge in 2020, the EAC established [National Poll Worker Recruitment Day](#), galvanizing national recruitment efforts and helping to alleviate concerns about a significant shortage in poll workers. The EAC plans to continue this effort to assist election officials in adequately staffing polling locations for future elections.

Much of the EAC's current and future work will serve election officials in addressing polling place quality and accessibility in the leadup to 2022 and beyond. The EAC strives to bolster confidence in our democracy by meeting our mission of adopting Voluntary Voting System Guidelines, testing voting systems, accrediting testing laboratories, disseminating best practices, and serving as a national clearinghouse of information on election administration. We have hosted numerous programs over the past several years, including roundtable discussions and public forums on polling place quality and accessibility to further information sharing and learning among election officials. We will utilize the work of the new Clearinghouse division to expand these offerings.

In February, the EAC Commissioners unanimously voted to adopt the [Voluntary Voting System Guidelines \(VVSG\) 2.0](#). The VVSG 2.0 improves accessibility, security, and interoperability of voting systems. By improving voting systems, we will ultimately improve polling place operations and the voter experience. VVSG 2.0 is a strengthened set of enhanced security requirements for voting machines. It constitutes a reasonable compromise that allows manufacturers to meet requirements, gives labs clear guidance to test and certify new voting

systems, and positions the EAC to pilot enhancements in the future. As the EAC grows and expands, we are also identifying crucial staffing needs to amplify our assistance regarding the implementation of these guidelines and the ability to keep them updated as the elections and technology landscape changes.

As a non-regulatory agency, the EAC's clearinghouse function is an important part of our mission to help officials improve the administration of elections. We are committed to assisting election officials with best practices that will help them assist voters. Our Clearinghouse Awards identify and promote successful polling place staffing and training efforts as well as improving accessibility for voters with disabilities. We are currently working to make information on these innovations more easily accessible as election officials consider innovations ahead of the 2022 elections.

The Help America Vote Act and other laws affirm the voting rights and elections procedures that are essential to protecting our nation's democracy. At the EAC, we take seriously our mandates to assist election officials, identify and develop best practices, and serve voters with disabilities. A critical piece of this mission includes enhancing access to polling places and improving accessibility. While the EAC's work supporting election officials helped ensure a positive experience in the 2020 elections for many voters, we are already expanding our work and are always looking for ways to enhance existing programs. We look forward to our continued work with Congress as we advance U.S. elections in 2022 and beyond.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, ranking member, and members of the Subcommittee. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.