

Voting Rights in Action: Engaging Maine Voters with Disabilities



A Guide for Family, Friends, and Providers

Table of Contents

3...Introduction

3...Why should people vote?

**4...Does a person with a disability
have the right to vote?**

**4...Is it okay for a person with a
disability to ask for help?**

4...Who can help?

5...Can I offer help?

**5...What rules or best practices
should I follow if I help someone?**



Introduction

This guide is intended to provide a quick summary of the rights of Maine citizens with disabilities to vote and be part of important election activities in Maine.

It is also intended to be a guide to supporters and allies of people with disabilities in helping them to assist and accommodate their clients and friends with disabilities.

Democracy is stronger when more people participate in decision making. This guide is a tool to help and encourage everyone to engage people with disabilities in the election process in Maine.

Why should people vote?

People with disabilities are under-represented at the polls in this country. If people with disabilities voted at the same rate as people without disabilities, there would be about 2.2 million more voters. (Lisa Schur, Rutgers University, 2016)

“Your vote is your voice.”

This year in Maine, the act of voting will give citizens a say in the election of Maine’s governor, a U.S. senator, a U.S. representative in their district, their state senator and representative, officials for county offices and local offices, and citizen initiatives and bond questions.

Voting is an opportunity to raise your voice on important issues that affect you.

It is a form of self-empowerment.

It is a way to keep people engaged and integrated in their communities.

Voting is a way to help practice skills that are useful in other parts of life, such as decision-making and self-empowerment.

Does a person with a disability have the right to vote?

Yes. In Maine, every U.S. citizen over the age of 18 has the right to vote. People under guardianship have the right to vote *unless their guardianship order specifically says they cannot vote*. That is a very rare occurrence. In Maine, most people under guardianship retain the right to vote.

If someone has a cognitive or intellectual disability that affects their learning, reading, writing, or speaking, they still have the right to vote.

If someone has a physical disability that affects their ability to fill out a registration form or mark a paper ballot, they still have the right to vote.

If someone is temporarily in a hospital or lives in a group home, they still have the right to vote.

People with disabilities have the right to cast a private vote that reflects their choice, just like Mainers without disabilities.

Is it okay to ask for help in voting?

Any Maine voter can ask for help from a friend or family member. A person with a disability has the right to ask for accommodation in registering or voting, or in other aspects of understanding the voting process.

Who can a voter ask to help them?

A person with a disability can ask for accommodations from their local voting clerk when filling out a voter registration card or casting a ballot.

They can also ask an individual family member, friend, provider, or caregiver for help.

Is there anyone that can't help a voter?

By law, their employer or union, or an agent of their employer or union cannot help them vote.

Can I offer help?

While voting in Maine is relatively easy, it does present some barriers to people who are unfamiliar with the process or who have limited access to transportation.

You can and should offer to help facilitate voting. You should, of course, not assume a person needs help.

You should only help them if they indicate they want help to register or vote. You should also let them know they can get accommodations from their town clerk to register and to cast a vote privately.

How can providers at facilities help someone vote?

Care facilities should let all residents know they have a right to vote, and that they can have help or accommodations to register and vote privately.

What rules or best practices should I follow if I help someone register or vote?

It is crucial that everyone assisting a voter should be:

Respectful
Confidential
Non-partisan

This means you should always...

- ★ Do what the voter asks you to do, even if you disagree with it.
- ★ Give the voter information about how to fill out the registration form and ballot correctly.
- ★ Give the voter information from elections materials, such as the Maine League of Women Voters Guide. The guide is available in print, audio, and American Sign Language at www.drme.org
- ★ Use language that is appropriate to the voter's needs. This can include clarifications and summaries, as long as it does not alter the meaning or contain a bias.
- ★ Clarify what the voter means, without biased questions.
- ★ Do not share how the voter registered or voted with anyone else.
- ★ Do not try to persuade the voter to vote a certain way or register with a specific party.
- ★ Do not wear clothing or pins that suggest the voter should vote a certain way, or that are affiliated with any political parties or preferences.
- ★ Be careful not to change the language of a ballot measure or candidate to try to influence the voter.
- ★ Be careful not to give the voter extra information or comments, or leave out information, to try to influence them.

What should I do to assist the person in voting?

- ★ Explain that they can skip any contest, or write in candidates. The voter does not have to vote for every office or question.
- ★ Explain they can request a replacement ballot at any time. This includes for mistakes, damage, or any other reason.
- ★ Let them know that they can request that the voting clerk give them accommodations to vote privately.

How can I make sure that I am giving the voter appropriate and adequate information about the candidates or measures?

As one of the people who communicates with the voter most often, you may know how to give them information that best meets their communication style. You can clarify and summarize ballot measures and candidates' positions, as long as you are not altering the meaning or giving a bias to the information. If you feel you do not have enough information or will give biased information, you can offer them other resources:

The Maine League of Women Voters publish a statewide, nonpartisan Easy-to-Read Voters' Guide for the June and November elections. It uses accessible language for ballot measures and candidate information.

The Easy-to-Read Voter Guide is available at drme.org in print, audio, and American Sign Language versions on our "voting access" page.

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207.766.7111 (VP)
207.797.9791 (FAX)
deafservices@drme.org

Disability Rights Maine (DRM) is
Maine's Protection & Advocacy
agency for people with disabilities.

Our mission is to ensure autonomy,
inclusion, equality, and access for
people with disabilities in Maine.



Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

Augusta

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The Maine Developmental Disabilities
Council (MDDC) is a partnership of
people with disabilities, their families,
and agencies which identifies barriers
to community inclusion, self
determination, and independence.

The Council acts to effect positive
change through advocacy, training,
demonstration projects, and support
for other inclusive and collaborative
systemic change activities.