# Accessible Voting Act

*Introduced by Senators Bob Casey (Chairman – U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging) and Amy Klobuchar (Chairwoman – U.S. Senate Committee on Rules & Administration)*

**Why do we need the Accessible Voting Act?**
Almost a quarter of the electorate was 65 years old or older in 2020, and an estimated 14.3 million citizens with disabilities reported voting in November 2018. The National Congress of American Indians found that the turnout rate for Native Americans and Alaska Native registered voters is between 5 to 14 percent lower than turnout rates of other racial and ethnic groups. There are nearly 26,000,000 individuals in the United States with limited English proficiency. These communities represent a large part of the electorate, but their voting needs are often overlooked and misunderstood.

Despite federal laws requiring accessible voting places, barriers for people with disabilities and older adults still exist. A study by the Government Accountability Office found that deficiencies in architectural and voting booth access resulted in only 17 percent of polling places being fully accessible in 2016. A report to the Election Assistance Commission found that in 2020 people with disabilities encountered difficulties voting at double the rate compared to people without disabilities. Many older Americans are unable to secure transportation to the polls, and it can be challenging for them to stand in long lines to cast their ballot. In 2017, the Native American Voting Rights Coalition found that the distance needed to travel to polling locations and drop off boxes for absentee ballots greatly affected the ability of Native Americans to cast ballots.

A number of strong voting rights bills have been introduced in Congress, but the barriers confronting these communities when casting a ballot are broad and they face specific challenges that are often overlooked. A strong legislative focus on the voting needs of older adults, the disability community, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and individuals with limited English proficiency is necessary to ensure they can exercise their right to vote.

**What will the Accessible Voting Act do?**

- **Establish the Office of Accessibility** within the Election Assistance Commission to support and oversee state efforts to expand voter accessibility and serve as a resource for advocates and voters.
- **Establish a new state grant program** for the Office of Accessibility to administer for the improvement of accessibility when registering to vote, voting by absentee ballot and casting a ballot in person.
- **Provide up-to-date voting information and resources**, through easily accessible websites, to ensure voters know how to register to vote, cast an absentee ballot and are able to find help if their right to vote is challenged.
- **Expand the number of options to cast a ballot** in federal elections to ensure older voters and voters with disabilities can utilize the voting option most accessible for them.
- **Create a national resource center on accessible voting** to conduct cultural competency trainings for election officials and poll workers to create truly accessible voting systems.
- **Re-authorize grants to states**, through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to improve voting accessibility for older Americans and people with disabilities.

**Endorsements:** ACLU, American Society on Aging, Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs, Association of University Centers on Disabilities, Autistic Self Advocacy Network, Center for Advocacy for the Rights & Interests of the Elderly, Diverse Elders Coalition, Five Cedars Group, Inc., Franciscan Action Network, League of Women Voters, National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities, National Council on Aging, National Disability Rights Network, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Progressive Turnout Project, SeniorLAW Center, Sierra Club

**For more information please contact** josh_dubensky@aging.senate.gov or greta_bedekovics@rules.senate.gov.

# Section-By-Section Summary

## Title I – Election Assistance Commission Office of Accessibility

**Section 101 – Establishment of the Election Assistance Commission Office of Accessibility**
Establishes an Office of Accessibility to support and oversee State efforts to expand voter accessibility and serve as a resource for advocates and voters.

**Section 102 – National Resource Center on Accessible Voting**
Establishes a national resource center to provide cultural competency training to election officials and poll workers on how to create a truly accessible polling place and provide a private and independent ballot.

**Section 103 – Establishment of a National Voter Accessibility Website**
Establishes a website administered by the Office of Accessibility to track the accessibility of online voter information nationwide and assist individuals in registering to vote and cast a ballot.

## Title II – State Requirements and Payments

**Section 201 – Establishment and Maintenance of State Accessible Election Websites**
Provides money to States to maintain accessible websites to provide information about the voting process.

**Section 202 – Designation of Single State Office to Provide Voter Accessibility Information**
Ensures States coordinate accessible voting information and procedures through a single office.

**Section 203 – Transparency Regarding Changes to State Election Laws**
Requires States to ensure changes to procedures to register to vote, including polling locations, or cast a vote be communicated to the public in accessible formats.

**Section 204 – Requirements to Promote Access to Voter Registration and No-Excuse Absentee Voting**
Requires States to provide accessible means to register to vote online, vote by no-excuse absentee ballot and cast a private and independent ballot.

**Section 205 – Protections for In-Person Voting**
Promotes options to address long lines and the use of mobile polling sites, as an addition to fully accessible polling places.

**Section 206 – Protections for Individuals Subject to Guardianship**
Ensures the right to vote for individuals subject to guardianship is not arbitrarily removed.

**Sections 207 and 208 – Payments to States for Implementation of Accessibility Requirements; and Amendments on Voluntary Guidance and Enforcement**
Authorizes states to receive $100 million in accessibility grants every 2 years to implement voter accessibility upgrades and incorporates new accessibility requirements into EAC guidance and enforcement.

## Title III – Federal Assistance

**Sections 301 and 302 –Reauthorization and Creation of Grant Programs to Assure Voting Access**
Expands grants available through the Department of Health and Human Services to States to improve and increase accessible voter registration, absentee voting, and in-person voting procedures. Provides funding through the EAC to develop accessible and secure remote voting systems for individuals with disabilities.

**Section 303 – Appointments to the Election Assistance Commission Board of Advisors**
Ensures that the disability community and older individuals are represented on the EAC Board of Advisors.

**Section 304 – Removal of Limitation on Voter Access Litigation by Protection and Advocacy Systems**
Permits Protection and Advocacy Systems to participate in litigation regarding voting access.

**Section 305 – Funding for Protection and Advocacy Systems**
Equalizes funding across all 57 Protection and Advocacy Systems.