

Accessible Voting Act

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

Why do we need the Accessible Voting Act?

Almost a quarter of the electorate will be 65 years old or older in 2020, and an estimated 14.3 million citizens with disabilities reported voting in November 2018. These communities represent a large part of the electorate, but their needs related to voting are often overlooked and misunderstood.

Despite federal laws requiring fully accessible voting places, barriers for people with disabilities and older adults still exist, suppressing their right to vote. A study by the Government Accountability Office found that combined deficiencies in architectural and voting booth access resulted in only 17 percent of polling places being fully accessible in 2016. Many older Americans have difficulties with mobility, are unable to secure transportation to the polls and have found polling places inaccessible. Of the 36 million Americans who are 65 years and older, 18 million need some form of assistance with daily activities. Because many older Americans require physical assistance, it can be challenging for them to make it to the polls and to cast their ballot, and potential lines at the polling place can add more obstacles.

A number of strong voting rights bills have been introduced in Congress, but the barriers confronting the aging and disability 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 and the disability community is necessary to ensure their needs are addressed and 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.

Cosponsors: Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY)

Endorsements: American Civil Liberties Union, The Arc of the United States, Association of University Centers on Disabilities, Autistic Self Advocacy Network, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, Center for American Progress League of Women Voters, National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities, National Council on Independent Living, National Federation of the Blind, National Disability Rights Network, and the Paralyzed Veterans of America

For more information or to cosponsor, please contact josh_dubensky@aging.senate.gov or greta_bedeckovics@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 adversely 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

Section 301 – Expansion and Reauthorization of a Grant Program 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.

Section 302 – 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 303 – 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 304 – Funding for Protection and Advocacy Systems

Equalizes funding across all 57 Protection and Advocacy Systems.