

NOVEMBER 3  
2020  
VOTE

# YOUR VOTE COUNTS

[ A GUIDE FOR GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES  
HEADING TO THE POLLS ]



A Special Advertising Supplement

# MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

BY ANNE STOKES

Legislation and policy affect you every day. You deserve a say.

**M**ark Johnson remembers a time before the Americans with Disabilities Act. As someone who has relied on a wheelchair since 1971, he's faced barriers that nondisabled people rarely encounter, like just being able to get through a door.

"When I went to go do certain things, there were accessibility issues ... because there wasn't the ADA," he says. "I went to my local polling site, it was at a firehouse, and the firehouse had a step up into it. They had to pull the firetrucks out of the bay so I could roll through there."

Johnson recently retired as director of advocacy for the Shepherd Center in Atlanta after 32 years of creating a more inclusive environment for patients and employees. Even though federal ADA regulations provide protection against disability-based discrimination in schools, the workplace and buildings, as well as transportation, communication and public services, Johnson says there are still areas lacking progress. People with disabilities continue to be

**"What kind of leadership do you want to take us to the next generation, not take us back, but to take us forward?"**

**MARK JOHNSON**  
*Disability activist and former director of advocacy for the Shepherd Center*



disproportionately affected by the lack of accessible and affordable housing, health care, education and employment.

According to the United States Census Bureau, nondisabled people are employed at a higher rate — 79 percent versus 41 percent — than people with disabilities. Accordingly, individuals with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty.

"A lot of the programs, services and support that the disability community depends on to live in the community are vulnerable because they're optional programs. If there's not as much revenue coming into the state coffers, what do you think gets cut first? Those programs," he explains. "Social support costs money. So if you live in a state that doesn't invest much in health and human services, that means they don't invest much in you."

Solutions to these issues need diverse voices to inform practices, policies and legislation. Voting is what gives *everyone* that voice.

"People going to the polls this year are really deciding what kind of country you want to live in and what kind of leadership you want to support, and what kind of values you want that leader to embrace and articulate," he says. "What kind of leadership do you want to take us to the next generation, not take us back, but to take us forward?"

## ★ LANDMARK LEGISLATION

1968

### ARCHITECTURAL BARRIERS ACT

The ABA ensures accessibility for people with disabilities for buildings and facilities that were designed, built or altered with federal funds. It requires accessible design elements like ramps, parking, doors, elevators, restrooms and signs at facilities like schools, government buildings and parks.

1973

### REHABILITATION ACT

Section 504 prohibits discrimination against or exclusion of an individual with a disability from participating in or benefiting from any program or activity receiving federal funding.

1975

### INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

IDEA entitles students with disabilities to a free and appropriate public education designed to meet their specific needs, including special education, early intervention and other related services.

1990

### AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

The ADA prohibits disability-based discrimination and exclusion, guaranteeing people with disabilities equal opportunities to fully participate in all aspects of society, including employment, housing, education, transportation and more.

# HAVE A PLAN B

BY RAUL CLEMENT

## People with disabilities can face challenges to voting. Have as much information as possible beforehand.

Voting can be a complicated process. And it is made even more difficult by a global pandemic and polling places closing in states such as Georgia. Fewer polling places means longer lines and less access. Add to that changes in technology, such as Georgia's new electronic voting machines, and it becomes more important than ever that all voters understand the resources at their disposal.

For voters with disabilities, these challenges are compounded. Transportation can be difficult,

for people with disabilities and offer guidance toward living a fully independent life. Pogue describes them as the "best hidden resource in the U.S. for people with disabilities. To us, independent living means having a choice and control. Being the driver in our own lives. Having the same rights and responsibilities."

One of these responsibilities, Pogue adds, is voting. For people with disabilities, early voting and absentee voting are essential. Pogue's organization can help people with disabilities figure out how to register, check their registration status, request an absentee ballot or vote early. Registration in Georgia must be completed by Oct. 5, 2020. Pogue recommends that voters in Georgia visit their My Voter Page at [sos.ga.gov](https://sos.ga.gov) to confirm that they are registered and request an absentee ballot or find their polling place.

Once you are registered, you should remain registered barring a change of address. But problems can occur. "It's really important to have a Plan B," Pogue says. Sometimes people show up to polling places to find they have been removed from the voter rolls. In this situation, they are given a provisional ballot. This, too, can be tracked at [sos.ga.gov](https://sos.ga.gov).

Pogue has a motto she feels sums up the mission of disABILITY LINK: "Nothing about us without us."

This necessarily includes voting. After all, what is independence without the ability to determine who represents you?

**"To us, independent living means having a choice and control. Being the driver in our own lives. Having the same rights and responsibilities."**

LINDA POGUE

Disability rights & peer support training advocate, disABILITY LINK



and once at polling places, voters with disabilities may find inadequate access or assistance. It's best to be even more prepared than usual, and this is where people like Linda Pogue with disABILITY LINK enter.

Organizations like disABILITY LINK are known as Centers for Independent Living. They advocate

## ★ KEY VOTER RESOURCES

★  
**TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NOV. 3, 2020 ELECTION, VOTERS IN GEORGIA MUST BE REGISTERED BY OCT. 5.**

Go to the Georgia Secretary of State's My Voter page at [mvp.sos.ga.gov](https://mvp.sos.ga.gov)

There you can:

- Register
- Report a change of address
- Request an absentee ballot
- Download a sample ballot
- Look up your polling place
- Determine where and how to vote early



**If you are unable to access the internet**, you will need to visit or call your local County Board of Registrars Office.



**Absentee ballots** can be requested via application any time between 180 days before the election to the Friday before the election (Oct. 30).



**Early voting begins Oct. 12** and lasts through Oct. 30. Availability varies by county.



**If you feel you have been denied access to voting**, have been removed from voter registration rolls in error, or have otherwise been treated unfairly, please contact the Georgia Advocacy Office at 1-800-537-2329.



## VOTING AND ADVOCACY RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

### How to download a sample ballot or apply for an absentee ballot:

- 1 Visit [mvp.sos.ga.gov](http://mvp.sos.ga.gov)
- 2 Once there, you will need to enter information such as your name, date of birth and county of residence.
- 3 If you're not registered, you can do so by supplying your driver's license or state ID number.
- 4 Applications can be completed online or printed and mailed in.

### Additional voting resources for people with disabilities:

#### REV UP GEORGIA: REGISTER, EDUCATE, VOTE, USE YOUR POWER

A nationwide advocacy group with a Georgia chapter

[facebook.com/RevUpGeorgia](https://facebook.com/RevUpGeorgia)

[twitter.com/RevUpGeorgia](https://twitter.com/RevUpGeorgia)

[aapd.com/advocacy/voting](http://aapd.com/advocacy/voting)

#### ACLU OF GEORGIA

Advocates for the voting rights for all residents of Georgia

[acluga.org](http://acluga.org)



# WORKING ALONGSIDE

BY RAUL CLEMENT

## Voting challenges can be tackled cooperatively. Here's how.

People with disabilities are a large and diverse segment of the population. When it comes to civic activities, such as voting, however, there are as many challenges as there are disabilities. Ramp access may be crucial for a voter with a physical disability, but it will not help someone with a sensory disability use an electronic voting machine.

Voters with developmental and intellectual disabilities face their own particular obstacles.

Organizations such as REV UP Georgia and The Arc Georgia work to ensure that voters have the tools they need to vote.

In Georgia, they represent 8% of the population. Organizations such as REV UP Georgia and The Arc Georgia work to ensure that these voters have the tools they need to vote.

Stacey Ramirez, co-chair of REV UP Georgia and state director of The Arc Georgia, describes The Arc's mission as "working alongside people with developmental and intellectual disabilities to ensure their human rights are upheld."

"That word, 'alongside,' is critical to me," Ramirez adds, explaining that people with disabilities often have key decisions made for them.

One key decision is voting. People with developmental disabilities may lack transport to a polling place, or they may have issues with standing in lines that have only grown longer as more polling places close permanently. Understanding how to fill out a ballot, as well as the necessary steps before doing so, presents a further issue. Absentee voting can help to

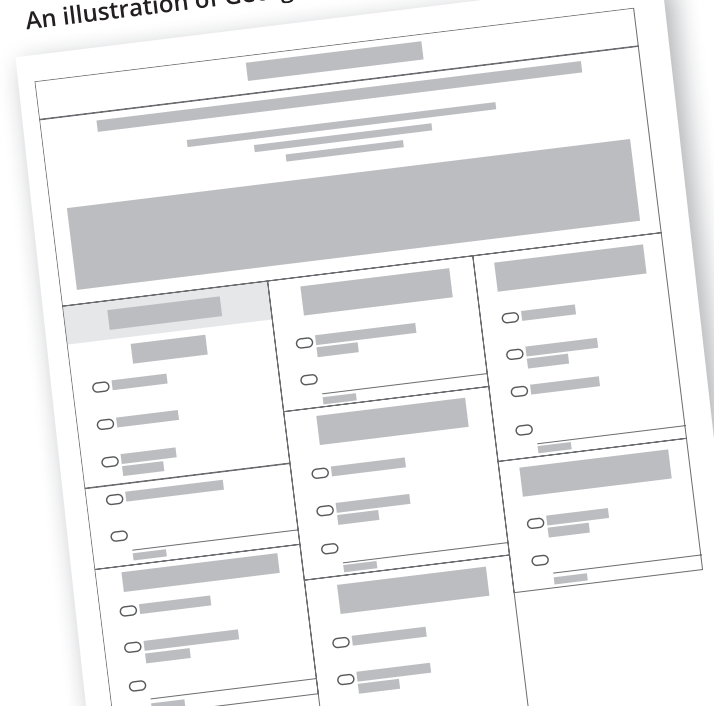
avoid lines, but in order to take advantage of it you must know where to apply for an absentee ballot and how to complete it. REV UP Georgia is working on literature that would explain, in simple and clear language, all the necessary steps.

Because the voting process can be confusing and time consuming for those with developmental disabilities, sample ballots can also be helpful. These allow you to see in advance what your official ballot will look like.

Beyond REV UP and The Arc, there are other organizations, such as the Georgia Advocacy Office and the ACLU Georgia, working to guarantee that every adult can vote.

For people with disabilities, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to voting issues. However, there are always people like Stacey Ramirez out there, eager to work "alongside."

An illustration of Georgia's sample ballot



# PROTECT YOUR INTERESTS

BY ANNE STOKES

**Know your issues—and where the candidates stand on them—before heading to the polls.**



Your vote is your voice. Elections determine national, state and local leadership that affect residents' everyday lives: Health care, school funding, affordable housing and so much more.

"Everyone's voice needs to be heard," says Vinny Olsziewski, chair for the Democratic Party of Georgia Disability Caucus. "Too often our elected officials only react to the voices they hear, so all marginalized groups in society need to make sure their voices are heard loudly and clearly by elected officials."

Whether you're mailing in your ballot or headed to the polls to cast your vote, it's important to know who you'll be voting for and where they stand on issues that are important to you.

## HEALTH CARE

Many people with disabilities rely on state- and federally-funded Medicaid and Medicare. Funding cuts to those programs disproportionately affect individuals with disabilities and their families.

## ACCESSIBLE HOUSING

Affordable housing is hard to find. Rent is rising twice as fast as inflation and new home construction remains low. People with disabilities may also have accessibility needs—single-story homes, low-threshold entries and wider doorways—which further lessen options.

## ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

For people unable to drive, public transit can be the most reliable way to get to work, run errands and make medical appointments. Most counties have some form of public transport, but in rural counties, options are sparse.

**"All marginalized groups in society need to make sure their voices are heard loudly and clearly by elected officials."**



**VINNY OLSZIEWSKI**  
*Chair, Democratic Party of Georgia Disability Caucus*

"There may be a paratransit with limited hours, but they won't cross the county line so you can't get to your doctor," says Olsziewski.

## EDUCATION

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ensures students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education. However, when state coffers run low, cuts to education affect all students, particularly those who depend on educational therapists, counselors, school nurses and other support systems.

These four issues disproportionately affect the disability community, Olsziewski says, but voters with disabilities often face difficulties accessing ballots, polling sites or even being informed they're eligible to vote.

"On average, people with disabilities vote at a 5-percentage point lower than able-bodied people," he says. "People need to vote and they need to find whatever means that makes it easiest for them...Get out and cast your vote."

## ★ WHERE TO LOOK

It's important to vote, but it's also important to be an informed voter. Visit the websites listed here for more information about candidates and where they stand on important issues as well as links to candidates' websites. You can also access information on registering to vote, voting options and polling locations, as well as what candidates and issues will be on your ballot.

**GEORGIA SECRETARY OF STATE**  
[sos.ga.gov](https://sos.ga.gov)

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS**  
[lww.org](https://lww.org)

**POLITICS 1**  
[politics1.com](https://politics1.com)

**PROJECT VOTE SMART**  
[justfacts.votessmart.org](https://justfacts.votessmart.org)

**BALLOTPEDIA**  
[ballotpedia.org](https://ballotpedia.org)



### STEP 1

#### Check in with a poll worker.

- Provide a valid photo ID, which the poll worker will scan to verify that your voter registration information is correct.
- Sign the Elector Oath.
- The poll worker will then load your ballot onto a voter access card and hand it to you.

### STEP 2

#### Place the voter access card into the voting machine.

- The ballot will appear on the screen and you will make your selections.
- Accessible options are located in the top right corner of the screen:
  - Change language
  - Text size
  - Screen reader
  - High contrast view
  - Sip and puff technology for the physically impaired

### STEP 3

#### Select your candidates by touching the screen.

- If you would like to change your choice, touch that candidate again and the screen will clear.
- You can review your choices when you are done selecting.

### STEP 4

#### Print and review your ballot.

### STEP 5

#### Insert the ballot into the scanner, which will confirm that your vote has been cast.



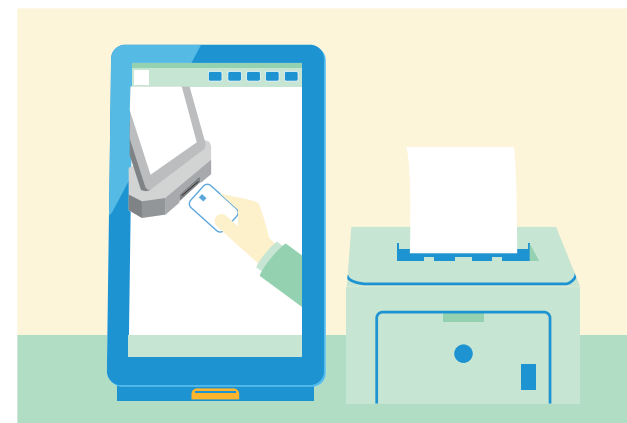
# VOTING BARRIERS

BY KRISTA SCRIPTER

**The State of Georgia is introducing new voting machines for its upcoming elections. The problem is many voters with disabilities will have difficulties using them.**

**D**anny Housley is the assistive technology acquisition manager at Tools for Life, the Assistive Technology Act program for the state of Georgia. When he went to see the demonstration of the new voting machines, the screen reader, an important function needed for voters with disabilities, didn't work.

The machine features a touchscreen where voters can input their choices, followed by a printed-out ballot for voters to verify that their vote was tallied correctly. For voters with disabilities, this method poses a problem. A person with vision impairment, for example, would be unable to use the machine without the use of a screen reader and it would be impossible for them to verify their paper ballot without the aid of another person. Gaylon Tootle, independent living advocate at Walton Options, says this is a violation of a voter's rights.



An illustration of Georgia's new voting machines

Tootle and Housley both voiced concern with the new voting machines, but were told that it would not be an issue on the day of the primary.

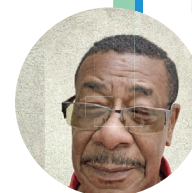
"That was a lie," Housley says. "My polling location didn't even have the controller that was needed to navigate the device. I was told every polling location was supposed to have those. I had to wait for one to be sent from 'downtown.'"

Housley, who is also blind, ended up waiting for more than four hours for the correct equipment to be brought to his polling location. This is a classic example, he says, of voters with disabilities feeling disenfranchised. "By denying accessibility you are denying people their vote. This lack of representation is why we are dying in nursing institutions, not getting proper community supports, or being represented properly in the state and nationally," he says.

Tootle says the state is making fixes ahead of Election Day, but those are Band-Aids on a bigger problem. "The mentality should be: Nothing for us without us. And voting is probably the number one way that a person can advocate," he says.

**"We don't need people to put barriers out there in front of us."**

**GAYLON TOOTLE**  
Independent living advocate  
Walton Options



"They should have a right to vote in total privacy if that is what they want," Tootle says. "We want privacy just like any other voter."

Tootle, who is blind, also says equal access to voting should not be a hassle for voters with disabilities. "We don't need people to put barriers out there in front of us," he says.

# WHAT TO KNOW AT THE POLLS

BY KRISTA SCRIPTER

**There's a lot of information out there. Here's how to make sure you're prepared to make your vote count.**

**C**heri Mitchell is a member of the HAVA (Help America Vote Act) Team at the Georgia Advocacy Office. Here are some of the most common issues she sees voters with disabilities have on election day, as well as how to navigate them.

## WHERE DO I GO TO VOTE?

Voters can find their polling place online at the Georgia Secretary of State's website: [mvp.sos.ga.gov](http://mvp.sos.ga.gov) The SOS also has a smartphone app available.

## WILL THE POLLING PLACE BE ACCESSIBLE TO ME?

By law, all polling places should be accessible. The Secretary of State will be providing "readers" to those who need them for the paper ballot printed at the end of a voter's session. If you would like to familiarize yourself ahead of time with Georgia's new voting machine, you can watch Georgia Public Broadcasting's video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgihFoMxKp4>.

## WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A VOTER?

"Under the Help America Vote Act, voters with disabilities are entitled to the same opportunities for both access and participation as all other voters," Mitchell says. "Additionally, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that governments provide people with disabilities a full and equal opportunity to vote."

The Georgia Advocacy Office will also release a survey in November following the election for voters with disabilities who experienced issues voting in the election. If you would like to receive a survey, contact Mitchell by email at [cmitchell@thegao.org](mailto:cmitchell@thegao.org) or call the GAO office at 404-885-1234.

## IS TRANSPORTATION AVAILABLE?

You have a few options for getting to the polls. Uber and Lyft often offer discounts for rides, and if you have a MARTA Mobility Breeze Card, you

may be able to make a reservation for a ride to your polling location.

Mitchell says there are multiple organizations that may be able to assist voters with transportation: "The Georgia Democrats Voter Protection Line (888-730-5816) has provided free rides to the polls, and the Republican Party of Georgia may also be able to assist (404-257-5559). You may also try the League of Women Voters (404-522-4598)."

Voters unable to get to their polling place may request a mail-in ballot and vote from home. "The ballot must be received by your county registrar by the time the polls close for voting," Mitchell says. You can request a mail-in ballot anytime between 180 days before the election to the Friday before the election (Oct. 30).

## AM I ALLOWED AN ASSISTANT INSIDE THE POLLING PLACE?

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 allows voters to bring someone with them to assist them with voting. In a federal election, this can be anyone except an employer, a representative of your employer, or a representative of your union, if you belong to one. Poll workers and watchers who are residents of your precinct are not allowed to help.

## WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW?

If you run into any issues while voting, ask for a provisional ballot. You have 48 hours to resolve the issue, and you can see the status of your provisional ballot through the SOS app or website. Mitchell says to vote early in the day if you can. "In Georgia, voters with disabilities do not have to wait in line at a polling place if they arrive between 9:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.," she says.

*Your vote counts. Take your time and ask for help if you need it.*



**"Under the Help America Vote Act, voters with disabilities are entitled to the same opportunities for both access and participation as all other voters."**

**CHERI MITCHELL**

Member, HAVA Team, Georgia Advocacy Office



## VOTER CHECKLIST

NOVEMBER 3  
2020  
VOTE

### REGISTER TO VOTE

- Visit [mvp.sos.ga.gov](http://mvp.sos.ga.gov)
- Enter your name, date of birth, address, county of residence and your driver's license or state ID number
- Applications can be completed online or printed and mailed in

### VOTING IN PERSON ON ELECTION DAY

- You must be registered to vote
- Bring ONE photo ID to your polling place
  - Any valid state or federal government-issued photo ID, including a free Voter Identification Card issued by your County Registrar's Office or the Georgia Department of Driver Services
  - A Georgia driver's license, even if expired
  - Valid employee photo ID from any branch, department, agency or entity of the U.S. government, Georgia, or any county, municipality, board, authority or other entity of this state
  - Valid U.S. passport
  - Valid U.S. military photo ID
  - Valid tribal photo ID



# GET OUT THE VOTE

**DON'T DELAY—REACH OUT NOW TO MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE RESOURCES YOU NEED TO VOTE THIS NOVEMBER**

### IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES

- ★ **Between now and Oct. 30**—Request an absentee/mail-in ballot
- ★ **Oct. 5**—Date you must be registered to vote
- ★ **Oct. 12-30**—Dates you may vote early
- ★ **Nov. 3**—Election Day (you can vote in person at your polling place; your mail-in ballot must be received by this date)

### PHONE NUMBERS TO CALL IF NEEDED

**GEORGIA ADVOCACY OFFICE**  
800-537-2329

**THE GEORGIA DEMOCRATS VOTER PROTECTION LINE**  
888-730-5816

**THE REPUBLICAN PARTY OF GEORGIA**  
404-257-5559

### LINKS TO HELPFUL WEBSITES AND OTHER RESOURCES

#### GEORGIA SECRETARY OF STATE

[mvp.sos.ga.gov](http://mvp.sos.ga.gov) (See My Voter Page to confirm you are registered to vote, request an absentee ballot or find your polling place)

#### REV UP GEORGIA

[aapd.com/advocacy/voting](http://aapd.com/advocacy/voting)  
[facebook.com/RevUpGeorgia](https://facebook.com/RevUpGeorgia)  
[twitter.com/RevUpGeorgia](https://twitter.com/RevUpGeorgia)

#### AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION (ACLU)

[acludgaorg](http://acludgaorg)

#### LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

[lww.org](http://lww.org)

#### POLITICS 1

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#### PROJECT VOTE SMART

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