

State of Alaska Division of Elections

Disability Awareness and Voter Assistance Information

Tips for Alaska's Election Workers

General Awareness Tips

- **Use common sense.** Treat people with disabilities the same way you would treat others – as a person! A person is a person first. The disability comes second.
- **Be sensitive to their needs.** People with disabilities are much more independent than people give them credit for being. Getting around the physical environment is often less frustrating than trying to communicate with people who are not sensitive to their needs.
- **Stay focused.** Limit inquiries about the person's disability to access and accommodation needs. It is understandable to be curious about someone's disability and he/she may be willing to talk to you about it, but it has little to do with the business at hand.
- **Don't assume.** What works for one person may not work for others with the same or similar type of disability.
- **Don't be afraid to offer assistance.** If the person looks as if they need assistance, ask if there is something you can do. Don't automatically give help unless the person clearly needs it or has asked for it.
- **Don't be patronizing.** Show the person the same respect that you expect to receive from others. Treat adults as adults.
- **Use appropriate terminology.** Avoid terms like physically challenged and handicapped. Within the disability community, it is common practice to say "people with disabilities" rather than saying "disabled people". Saying "a person who uses a wheelchair" is appropriate. "Wheelchair user", "wheelchair bound" or "wheelchair restricted" is not. If in doubt, ask; people with disabilities are generally tolerant and forgive most social blunders.

General Assistance Tips

The voter may have a person of his or her choice provide assistance as long as that person is not their employer, agent of their employer or agent of a union that the voter is a member of.

Sample ballots are great tools to assist voters. If voters are standing in line, encourage them to review sample ballots so that they are prepared to vote when they get into the voting booth.

- Give the person extra time to complete each task.
- Offer voters with disabilities the opportunity to vote unassisted on the touch screen voting unit.
- If you notice that someone appears confused, approach the person courteously and offer assistance.
- Ask questions to determine if assistance is needed. Suggest specific actions, as opposed to general processes.
- Explain concisely. Exercise patience. Voting can be a first-time experience for some people.
- Ask for help from a service provider, if available. Service providers may transport and accompany individuals or groups. Their goal is to support the integration of people with disabilities in the community.
- Offer assistance with reading, equipment operation, etc. People may have low-language and/or reading skills. Helping people use the touch-screen voting unit may be necessary.
- Stay aware in case the person needs more help. People who experience cognitive impairments may avoid asking for help.

Assisting voters with...

Hearing Impairments

Speak clearly and distinctly but don't exaggerate. Use normal speech speed unless asked to slow down. Speak directly to the person, instead of from the side or behind the person.

- If you are having trouble understanding a deaf person's speech, feel free to ask him/her to repeat. If that doesn't work, then use paper and pen. Printed instructions may be useful.
- If a person who is deaf is with an interpreter, speak directly to the person, not to the interpreter.
- Find out how the person communicates. If the person reads lips, speak in a normal fashion. Do not exaggerate your speaking. Short and simple sentences and yes/no questions may work best. Avoid blocking the view of your face and mouth.
- Get someone's attention by tapping his/her shoulder or gently waving your hand in front of that person before starting a conversation.

Visual Impairments

Introduce yourself and let the voter know that you are an election official.

- Give the person verbal information about things that are visually obvious to those who can see. Describe things from their perspective, not yours. Some people who are blind use a "clock" reference for things or obstacles directly in front of them. For example, you can state, "There is a chair at 10 o'clock." Before using this method, ask if it is useful to them.
- Lead someone who is blind only after he/she has accepted your offer to do so. Touch his/her arm, and then offer your arm to guide that person. Allow the voter to hold your arm rather than you holding onto theirs.
- Do not interact with a service animal or guide dog while it is working.
- Keep the path to the voting booth clear of obstacles.

- Inform the person of snow levels and/or icy conditions when walking on the sidewalk or ramp near the door. This can help prevent accidents.
- Do not leave a person who is blind in an empty space. Provide a physical object, a table, chair, etc. so that he or she can remain oriented. For example, "The chair at the registration table is directly in front of you, about 18 inches. Would you like me to place your hand on it?"
- If you are with a person who is blind and need to leave, tell him/her you are going in a respectful way, such as "I need to go check with the election official." Otherwise, he/she may not realize you have gone and try to continue a conversation.

Mobility Impairments

Watch diligently for voters with mobility issues. If necessary, assist the voter into the polling place.

- Offer assistance, but wait until it is accepted before giving it. Giving help before it is accepted is perceived as rude, and can sometimes be unsafe.
- Don't touch a person's wheelchair without permission.
- Give the person adequate time to complete tasks.
- Eye contact is important for one-on-one conversation. Find a nearby place to sit where you can see eye-to-eye.
- Talk directly to a person with a disability as you would any other person.

Contact

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Region II Elections Office (Anchorage) (Mat-Su)	522-8683 373-8952
Region III Elections Office	451-2835
Region IV Elections Office	443-5285