

Mapping Disabled Americans' Access to Democracy: Pennsylvania

By Casey Doherty | October 29, 2026

Author's note: The disability community is rapidly evolving to use identity-first language in place of person-first language. This is because it views disability as being a core component of identity, much like race and gender. Some members of the community, such as people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, prefer person-first language. In this report, the terms are used interchangeably.

In July 2026, the Center for American Progress introduced the [Accessible Democracy Tracker](#), a new resource that provides users with comprehensive, state-specific voting and election accessibility scores based on survey data from state and local disability and civic organizations. The tracker also offers stories from disabled voters across the country, national and state action targets, and national and state disability and civic organizations to which users can turn for more information on voting accessibility efforts.

The tracker examines accessibility across five areas of the voting process: voter registration efforts, voting information, in-person voting, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, and voting by mail. Together, these data provide a snapshot of where disabled voters experience barriers and where states have opportunities to improve voting accessibility.

As part of CAP's continued analysis of voting accessibility, this fact sheet takes a closer look at the experiences of disabled voters and opportunities to strengthen voting access in Pennsylvania.

Early findings in Pennsylvania

According to state and local disability and civic organizations surveyed for the [Accessible Democracy Tracker](#), Pennsylvania received an overall voting accessibility score of 3.8 out of 5, above the national score of 3.3.

Accessibility varied considerably across different parts of the voting process.



Explore the map:
<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/accessibledemocracy/>

Pennsylvania voting accessibility scores:

4.0

Registration
efforts

4.0

Voting
information

2.8

Voting
in person

4.3

ADA
compliance

3.8

Voting
by mail

Pennsylvania scored above the national average in four of the five categories measured by the [Accessible Democracy Tracker](#). Registration efforts received a score of 4, compared with 2.3 nationally, while voting information received a 4, compared with 3.1 nationally. Pennsylvania also received a relatively high ADA compliance score of 4.3, compared with the national score of 3.8. Voting by mail received a score of 3.8, roughly in line with the national score of 3.7.

In-person voting, however, was an area where respondents identified greater barriers. Pennsylvania received a score of 2.8 for in-person voting, below its scores in every other category and the national in-person voting score of 3.4. The gap suggests that even where registration, voting information, and polling place accessibility measures are reported as relatively accessible, disabled Pennsylvanians may still encounter barriers in getting to and voting at the polls.

Pennsylvania's [House Bill 1396](#), an omnibus election reform bill, passed the state House in May 2025 and was referred to the Senate State Government Committee. It would require counties to [consider access](#) to public transportation, parking availability, proximity to nursing homes and long-term care facilities, and other geographic factors when selecting early voting locations. Additionally, the legislation would require counties to provide at least two ballot drop boxes, with additional locations based on the number of registered voters. For disabled voters who face transportation barriers, having more ballot return locations could make voting by mail more accessible.

These provisions are particularly relevant, as voting in person received Pennsylvania's lowest score across the voting categories by a significant margin. Pennsylvania organizations surveyed for the [Accessible Democracy Tracker](#) identified free, accessible public transportation and accessibility of routes to polling places as areas for improvement.

In 2023, Pennsylvania implemented [automatic voter registration](#) for eligible residents obtaining driver's licenses and identification cards at PennDOT centers. This is particularly significant because automatic voter registration has been shown to [increase registration](#), keep [voter rolls](#) up to date, reduce racial disparities in registration rates, and make voter registration more [accessible](#) for disabled people. This is in line with Pennsylvania's relatively high voter registration efforts score of 4, compared with the national score of 2.3.

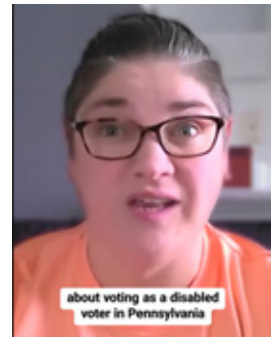
A disabled Pennsylvanian's experience

Kate, a disabled voter from Pennsylvania, shared with CAP in an interview that she has encountered significant barriers when trying to vote. She described challenges with completing inaccessible applications for mail-in ballots. When she received a paper ballot during a recent primary election, she could not read it and required a neighbor's help.

Kate also shared that she submitted formal complaints about the accessibility barriers she encountered but did not receive confirmation or a response. "Whenever I run into barriers in accessibility in voting, it feels very discouraging because I've done my research. I go there knowing who I'm going to vote for and why," she explained. "It feels wrong. We just aren't actually implementing the things that will allow people to participate fully in their civic duties, and that's not okay."

Kate emphasized the importance of poll workers treating disabled voters with patience and respect, without requiring them to explain or disclose their disabilities. "Just appreciate that when they say they need something, that all you have to do is make sure that they get access to what they need," she said.

Finally, Kate suggested that Centers for Independent Living could serve as polling locations, which she said could provide disabled voters with familiar, accessible spaces and staff who understand access needs.



Learn from Kate's experiences – VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbOjuSekyOY>

Targeted issue areas

The [Accessible Democracy Tracker](#) features state-specific issue area targets, gathered from state and local disability and civic organizations working to ensure disabled people can vote.

Common ideas for improvement in Pennsylvania include:

- Provide free, accessible transportation to the polls
- Ensure parking and exterior routes to the polling location are accessible
- Provide information on elections and voting, including sample ballots, in Braille

Continuing to map voting accessibility

The [Accessible Democracy Tracker](#) is designed to grow as CAP collects additional data. CAP plans to continue collecting survey submissions from state-based and local disability and civic organizations in order to conduct state-level analysis, produce additional state-based fact sheets, and perform longitudinal analysis of changes in voting accessibility scores over time. CAP is also continuing to collect stories from disabled voters about their experiences participating in elections.

Please contact accessible_democracy@americanprogress.org if your organization is interested in completing the survey, and complete [this form](#) if you are a disabled voter interested in sharing your voting experiences.

Ensuring that disabled people can participate fully in elections is essential to American democracy. The [Accessible Democracy Tracker](#) offers advocates, policy-makers, and community organizations a tool to identify where voting accessibility progress has been made, where barriers exist, and what reforms would increase accessibility for disabled voters.

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