

October 2001

# VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES

## Access to Polling Places and Alternative Voting Methods

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## Abbreviations

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| ADA   | Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990                  |
| ANSI  | American National Standards Institute                    |
| DCI   | data collection instrument                               |
| DOD   | Department of Defense                                    |
| DOJ   | Department of Justice                                    |
| FEC   | Federal Election Commission                              |
| NACO  | National Association of Counties                         |
| NACRC | National Association of County Recorders and Clerks      |
| NASED | National Association of State Election Directors         |
| NASS  | National Association of Secretaries of State             |
| VAEHA | Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act |
| VRA   | Voting Rights Act of 1965                                |



United States General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

October 15, 2001

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health  
and Human Services, and Education  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

The Honorable John McCain  
Ranking Minority Member, Committee on  
Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Ranking Minority Member, Committee on  
Rules and Administration  
United States Senate

Voting is the foundation of our American democratic system, and federal law generally requires access to voting on Election Day for people with disabilities. Under the law, state political subdivisions responsible for conducting elections must assure that polling places used in federal elections are accessible, as determined by the state.<sup>1</sup> Exceptions are allowed if the state determines that all potential polling places have been surveyed and no accessible place is available, and the political subdivision cannot make one temporarily accessible.<sup>2</sup> In these cases, voters with disabilities who are assigned to inaccessible polling places must be, upon advance request, either reassigned to an accessible polling place or provided another means for voting on Election Day.<sup>3</sup> These requirements present a challenge to state and local election officials because achieving accessibility—which is affected by the type of impairment and various barriers posed by polling place facilities and voting methods—is part of a larger set of challenges they face in administering elections on a periodic basis.

<sup>1</sup>See the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act, 42 U.S.C. section 1973ee et seq.

<sup>2</sup>Exceptions are also allowed in the case of an emergency, as determined by the chief election officer of the state. See 42 U.S.C. section 1973ee-1(b)(1).

<sup>3</sup>42 U.S.C. section 1973ee-1(b)(2)(B).

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Because nationwide information on the accessibility of voting for people with disabilities is dated and has significant limitations, you asked us to study voting access for people with disabilities, including access to polling places and alternative voting methods. This study is part of a broader body of GAO work about election procedures and election reform issues that we are doing at the request of various members of the Congress. This report (1) examines state and local provisions and practices for assuring voting accessibility, both at polling places and with respect to alternative voting methods and accommodations;<sup>4</sup> (2) estimates the proportion of polling places with features that might facilitate or impede access, including features of polling booths and voting accommodations; and (3) identifies efforts and challenges to improving voting accessibility.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>In this report, we define alternative voting method to be any voting method other than traditional in-person voting at a polling place on Election Day. Alternative voting methods include early voting and absentee voting, which may be available to all voters. We use the term accommodations to refer to measures mainly intended to facilitate voting for people with disabilities. Accommodations provided at the polling place include curbside voting (whereby a ballot is brought outside the polling place to a voter who is unable to enter the polling place), poll worker assistance, Braille or large-type ballots or instructions, and other visual or audio aids. Other accommodations made available outside the traditional polling place include reassignment to accessible polling places and permanent absentee voting.

<sup>5</sup>This report focuses on access to voting for people with physical disabilities, but does not specifically address access for voters with hearing impairments. It also does not address access to voter registration.

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To examine provisions for assuring voting accessibility, we reviewed state statutes and regulations pertaining to voting accessibility—both at polling places and with respect to alternative voting methods—for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. We also reviewed written policies and other guidelines that we identified or were provided by chief election officials for all states, the District of Columbia, and a statistical sample of 100 counties, selected to be representative of all counties in the contiguous United States with the exception of those in Oregon.<sup>6</sup> (The county selection process is described later in this section.) In addition, we interviewed election officials in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and in the 100 counties in our sample to identify practices for assuring voting accessibility.<sup>7</sup> However, we did not verify the implementation of state and county provisions or practices.

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<sup>6</sup>We drew our sample of 100 counties using the *Census Bureau's Population Estimates for Counties by Age and Sex: Annual Time Series* (for 1998), which included a total of 3,074 counties or statistically similar subdivisions. We did not include counties outside the contiguous United States for reasons of cost and efficiency, or counties in Oregon because, since 1998, elections in this state have been conducted almost exclusively by mail. The 100 counties in our sample are located in 33 states.

<sup>7</sup>In most states, responsibility for conducting elections is entrusted to county election officials. For the 100 counties, we generally contacted county election officials. However, in four counties we contacted election officials at a subcounty level, such as towns and cities, where the responsibility for elections resided, and then combined their responses to create county-level responses.

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To estimate the proportion of polling places in the contiguous United States with features that might facilitate or impede access for people with mobility, dexterity, and visual impairments, we visited randomly selected polling places across the country on Election Day (Nov. 7, 2000). We used a two-stage sampling method that created a nationally representative sample of polling places in the contiguous United States.<sup>8</sup> The first stage involved randomly selecting 100 counties. We based the probability of each county's selection on the size of its voting age population so that heavily populated counties, which tend to have more polling places than less-populated counties, would have a greater chance of being included in the sample. The second stage involved randomly selecting eight polling places in each county. We then visited no less than 3 and up to 8 polling places per county, for a total of 496 polling places on Election Day.<sup>9</sup> At each polling place, using a composite of various federal and nonfederal accessibility guidelines,<sup>10</sup> we took measurements and made observations of features of the facility and voting methods that could potentially impede access—such as no accessible parking, steep ramps, high door thresholds, and voting booths that did not accommodate voters in wheelchairs. We also interviewed poll workers in charge of the polling place to identify accommodations offered at the polling place—such as curbside voting outside the polling place, and poll worker assistance and other voter aids inside the voting room. We documented our observations and interviews with poll workers in a data collection instrument we developed. However, because the extent to which any given feature may affect access is dependent upon numerous factors—including the type or severity of an individual's disability—we were not able to determine whether any

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<sup>8</sup>Sampling errors for these data generally range from 3 to 10 percentage points, unless otherwise noted in this report.

<sup>9</sup>The 496 polling places we visited on Election Day were located in 85 of the 100 counties. We visited an additional 89 polling places in 15 counties before or after Election Day because we were unable to gain access to polling places in these counties on Election Day. Because we were unable to visit these polling places on Election Day, we were only able to collect partial data at these sites. See app. I for an analysis of these data.

<sup>10</sup>Because a single set of access standards for polling places does not exist, we incorporated into our data collection instrument criteria from the following federal and nonfederal accessibility guidelines: the 1991 Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities; the *ADA Guide for Small Towns*; the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) accessibility guidelines; and accessibility documents published by the Federal Election Commission (FEC), and the National Organization on Disability, and the National Task Force on Accessible Elections. See app. I for more information on the development of the data collection instrument.



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observed feature prevented access. Accordingly, we do not categorize polling places as “accessible” or “inaccessible.” Moreover, we were not able to determine whether curbside voting or other accommodations offered at polling places actually facilitated voting. Finally, we did not assess whether our observations on Election Day were consistent with state and county provisions or practices.

To identify efforts and challenges to improving voting access, we interviewed election officials in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the 100 counties in our sample to obtain their views on the challenges associated with improving the accessibility of polling places and voting equipment.<sup>11</sup> We also interviewed selected election officials and representatives of disability organizations to obtain their views on the costs of accessible voting equipment and the extent to which alternative voting methods and accommodations improve access for voters with disabilities.

See appendix I for more information on our methods; appendix II for a copy of our data collection instrument; and appendix III for a list of the people, counties, states, and organizations we contacted.

We performed our work from May 2000 to July 2001 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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## Results in Brief

All states<sup>12</sup> have provisions (in the form of statutes, regulations, or policies) that specifically address voting by people with disabilities. However, consistent with the broad discretion afforded states, these provisions vary greatly. For example, our review of state provisions shows that while 42 states have established standards by which to judge the accessibility of polling places, the number and specificity of these standards vary from state to state, and the remaining 9 states have not established specific accessibility standards. State laws and policies also vary on how counties are to assure accessibility of polling places. For example, while some states require counties to inspect polling places for accessibility, many do not. Nevertheless, our survey of counties confirms that most counties

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<sup>11</sup>Sampling errors for county survey data generally range from 4 to 25 percentage points. We generally present the lower bound of the estimate when the sampling error is large.

<sup>12</sup>For analytical purposes we treated the District of Columbia as a state, resulting in a total of 51 states.

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inspect all polling places for accessibility. Our county survey also shows that county practices for assuring accessibility vary. For example, while some counties cite accessibility as a specific criterion used in selecting polling places, others do not.

All states provide for one or more alternative voting methods or accommodations that may facilitate voting by people with disabilities whose assigned polling places are inaccessible. For example, all states have provisions allowing voters with disabilities to vote absentee without requiring notary or medical certification requirements, although the deadlines and methods (for example, by mail or in person) for absentee voting vary among states. In addition, many states, but not all, have laws or policies that provide for other accommodations and alternatives for voting on or before Election Day—such as reassignment to a polling place that is accessible, curbside voting, or early voting.

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On Election Day 2000, we made onsite observations and collected data at polling places on features that may facilitate or impede access for those individuals with disabilities who prefer to vote at the polls in the same manner as the general public. (Polling places are generally located in schools, libraries, churches, and town halls, as well as other facilities.) Although the extent to which any given feature may prevent or facilitate access is unknown, we estimate that, from the parking area to the voting room, 16 percent of all polling places in the contiguous United States<sup>13</sup> have no potential impediments, 56 percent have one or more potential impediments but offer curbside voting, and 28 percent have one or more potential impediments and do not offer curbside voting.<sup>14</sup> (See fig. 1.) These potential impediments would primarily affect individuals with mobility impairments. Such potential impediments occur most often on the route from the parking area to the building or at the entrance to the polling place, with more than half of all polling places having impediments in these areas. Inside the voting room, the types and arrangement of voting equipment used may also pose challenges for people with mobility, vision, or dexterity impairments. To facilitate voting inside the voting room, polling places generally provide accommodations, such as voter assistance, magnifying devices, and voting instructions or sample ballots in large print. However, none of the polling places that we visited had special ballots or voting equipment adapted for blind voters.<sup>15</sup>

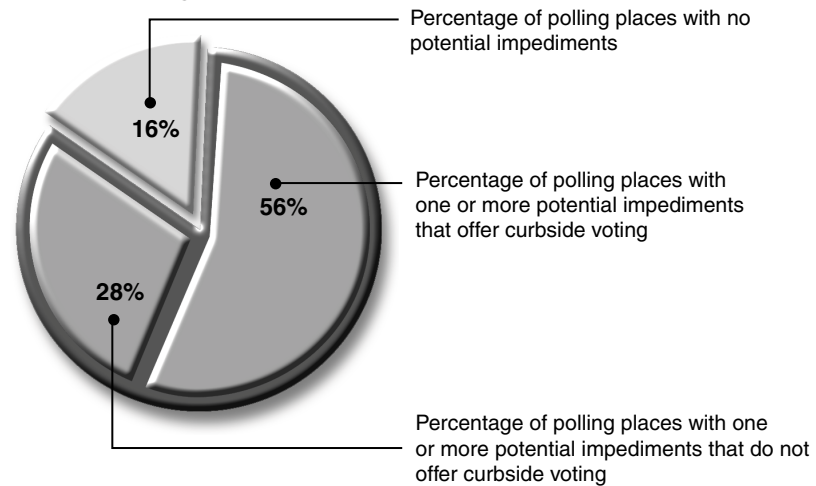
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<sup>13</sup>Although our results are representative of all polling places in the United States, they may not be representative of all polling places in any individual state.

<sup>14</sup>Although curbside voting is not available at a number of polling places with potential impediments, as noted earlier all states have provisions for absentee voting, and many states provide for other alternative voting methods or accommodations, which may facilitate voting by people with disabilities on or before Election Day.

<sup>15</sup>Although we did not observe such aids on Election Day, some county officials told us that, upon request, they try to provide special aids so that blind individuals can vote independently. We may not have observed these aids on Election Day because they may not have been requested in advance by voters in the polling places that we visited or the local poll workers we interviewed may not have been aware of these aids.

**Figure 1: Prevalence of Potential Impediments at Polling Places and Availability of Curbside Voting**



Note: These potential impediments are located along the route from the parking area to the voting room.

Source: GAO analysis of polling place data collected on Nov. 7, 2000.

A number of efforts have been made by states and localities to improve voting accessibility for people with disabilities, such as modifying polling places, acquiring new voting equipment, and expanding voting options. Nevertheless, state and county election officials we surveyed cited a variety of challenges to improving access. Election officials cited the limited availability of accessible facilities as one major challenge. Facilities used as polling places, such as schools and churches, are generally owned or controlled by public or private entities not responsible for running elections, complicating attempts to make polling places more accessible. In addition, some election officials indicated that funding constraints at the local level pose another challenge, hindering the acquisition of voting equipment that is more accessible. Finally, expanding the availability of alternative voting methods or accommodations can provide voters with additional options but implementing these changes can present election officials with legal, administrative, and operational challenges. Moreover, some disability advocates believe that although alternative voting methods and accommodations, such as curbside voting, expand options for voters with disabilities, they do not provide the same voting opportunities afforded the general public (that is, the opportunity to vote independently

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and privately at a polling place) and should not be viewed as permanent solutions for inaccessible polling places.

Although improving access for voters with disabilities presents challenges for state and local election officials, this issue warrants attention and consideration, particularly in light of recent nationwide discussions over election reform. While our report does not take a position on what the appropriate access policy should be, as the Congress and other policymakers at all levels of government consider measures aimed at improving the accuracy of elections and the ability of American citizens to participate in the electoral process, it would be appropriate to consider how such reforms could affect access for people with disabilities.

We provided a copy of our draft report to selected representatives of national organizations representing state and county election officials and people with disabilities;<sup>16</sup> the Department of Justice; and the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (the Access Board) for their review. Overall, the reviewers stated that our report presented information on access to polling places and alternative voting methods in a fair and balanced manner. In some cases, the reviewers provided technical comments or made specific suggestions to improve the clarity of the report. We incorporated their comments where appropriate.

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<sup>16</sup>These national organizations include the National Association of State Election Directors, the Election Center's National Task Force on Voting Accessibility, the National Association of County Recorders and Clerks, the American Foundation for the Blind, and the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

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## Background

Holding federal elections in the United States is a massive enterprise, administered primarily at the local level. On Election Day, millions of voters visit polling places across the country, which are located in schools, recreation centers, churches, various government buildings, and even private homes.<sup>17</sup> For the 2000 election, counties and other local jurisdictions deployed about 1.4 million poll workers and more than 700,000 voting machines to polling places across the country.<sup>18</sup> Each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia also play a role in elections, by establishing election laws and policies and providing oversight in their respective states. The federal government's role in the administration of elections is fairly limited. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) is generally responsible for regulating the financing of elections, serving as a clearinghouse for information on elections, and providing advice and assistance to state and local election administrators.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Federal elections are held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November in even-numbered years. In the interests of convenience and economy, most states and many local jurisdictions also hold many of their elections on federal Election Day.

<sup>18</sup>Data are from the *National Association of Secretaries of State Election Reform Resolution*, Feb. 6, 2001, [http://www.nass.org/pubs/pubs\\_electionres.html](http://www.nass.org/pubs/pubs_electionres.html) (cited Mar. 26, 2001).

<sup>19</sup>For example, the FEC's Office of Election Administration worked with industry experts to establish a voluntary set of standards for computer-based voting equipment in 1990.

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While federal elections are generally conducted under state laws and policies, a few federal laws apply to voting and some provisions specifically address accessibility issues for voters with disabilities.<sup>20</sup> Most notably, the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act (VAEHA), enacted in 1984, requires that political subdivisions responsible for conducting elections assure that all polling places for federal elections are accessible to elderly voters and voters with disabilities.<sup>21</sup> Two exceptions are allowed: (1) in the case of an emergency as determined by the chief election officer of the state, and (2) when the chief election officer of the state determines that all potential polling places have been surveyed and no such accessible place is available, nor is the political subdivision able to make one temporarily accessible in the area involved. Any elderly voter or voter with a disability assigned to an inaccessible polling place, upon his or her advance request, must be assigned to an accessible polling place or be provided with an alternative means for casting a ballot on the day of the election.<sup>22</sup> Under the VAEHA, the definition of “accessible” is determined under guidelines established by the state’s chief election officer, but the law does not specify what those guidelines shall contain or the form those guidelines should take. The VAEHA also contains provisions to make absentee voting more accessible and provides for voting aids at polling places.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>For a broader review of federal laws affecting elections, see *Elections: The Scope of Congressional Authority in Election Administration* (GAO-01-470, Mar. 13, 2001).

<sup>21</sup>42 U.S.C. section 1973ee et seq.

<sup>22</sup>The Senate Report which accompanied the VAEHA noted that “...other means for casting a ballot could include, but would not be limited to, curbside voting or voting with an absentee ballot on the day of the election.” See S. Rep. No. 98-590, at 2 (1984).

<sup>23</sup>Specifically, under the VAEHA, no notarization or medical certification shall be required of a voter with a disability with respect to an absentee ballot or an application for such ballot, except that a state may require medical certification to establish eligibility for a permanent absentee application or ballot, or to apply for an absentee ballot after the deadline has passed (42 U.S.C. section 1973ee-3(b)). In addition, each state shall make available voting aids at all polling places, including large-print instructions, and the chief election officer shall provide public notice, calculated to reach affected voters, of the availability of aids (42 U.S.C. section 1973ee-3(a) and (c)).

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The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) also applies to voting. Title II of the ADA and implementing regulations require that people with disabilities have access to basic public services, including the right to vote; however, it does not strictly require that all polling place sites be accessible.<sup>24</sup> Under the ADA, public entities must make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures to avoid discrimination against people with disabilities. Moreover, no individual with a disability may, by reason of the disability, be excluded from participating in or be denied the benefits of any public program, service, or activity. State and local governments may comply with ADA accessibility requirements in a variety of ways, such as by redesigning equipment, reassigning services to accessible buildings or alternative accessible sites, or altering existing facilities or constructing new ones.<sup>25</sup> However, state and local governments are not required to take actions that would threaten or destroy the historic significance of an historic property, fundamentally alter the nature of a service, or impose undue financial and administrative burdens. Moreover, a public entity is not required to make structural changes in existing facilities where other methods are effective in achieving compliance.<sup>26</sup> In choosing between available methods of complying with the ADA, state and local governments must give priority to the choices that offer services, programs, and activities in the most integrated setting appropriate.

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<sup>24</sup>42 U.S.C. sections 12131 to 12134. Title II, Subtitle A, covers all activities of state and local governments, regardless of the government entity's size or receipt of federal funding.

<sup>25</sup>28 C.F.R. section 35.150(b)(1). All newly constructed public buildings where construction commenced after Jan. 26, 1992, must be readily accessible to individuals with disabilities (28 C.F.R. section 35.151(a)). Alterations to existing facilities commenced after Jan. 26, 1992, must also be readily accessible to the maximum extent feasible (28 C.F.R. section 35.151(b)).

<sup>26</sup>Under "Project Civic Access," the Department of Justice reached agreements with a number of cities and towns to open up civic life, including voting, to people with disabilities. Some agreements require altering polling places or providing curbside or absentee balloting. U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, *Enforcing the ADA: A Status Report from the Department of Justice*, Washington, D.C.: (Apr.-Sept. 2000).



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Title III of the ADA covers commercial facilities and places of “public accommodation” such as restaurants, private schools, and privately operated recreation centers.<sup>27</sup> Such facilities may also be used as polling places. Under Title III, public accommodations must make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures to facilitate access for individuals with disabilities.<sup>28</sup> They are also required to remove physical barriers in existing buildings when it is “readily achievable” to do so, that is, when it can be done without much difficulty and expense, given the public accommodation’s resources. In the event that removal of an architectural barrier cannot be accomplished easily, the accommodation may take alternative measures to facilitate accessibility.<sup>29</sup> All buildings newly constructed by public accommodations and commercial facilities must be readily accessible; alterations to existing buildings are required to the maximum extent feasible to be readily accessible to individuals with disabilities, including those who use wheelchairs.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) provides that any voter requiring assistance to vote “by reason of blindness, disability, or inability to read or write may be given assistance by a person of the voter’s choice....”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Exempted from these requirements generally are private clubs and religious organizations, including places of worship.

<sup>28</sup>28 C.F.R. section 36.302(a).

<sup>29</sup>For example, the accommodation can rearrange furniture or provide curb service or home delivery (28 C.F.R. section 36.305). It may also widen a doorway to a narrower width or install a ramp with a steeper slope than is permitted by ADA accessibility guidelines (28 C.F.R. section 36.304(d)(2)).

<sup>30</sup>28 C.F.R. sections 36.401 to 36.406 (requirement applies to new construction with certificates of occupancy issued after Jan. 26, 1993, or alteration commenced after Jan. 26, 1992).

<sup>31</sup>42 U.S.C. section 1973aa-6. However, the VRA prohibits assistance provided by the voter’s employer or an agent of that employer, or an officer or agent of the voter’s union.

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Although these federal laws support the right to vote for persons with disabilities, concerns continue to be expressed about voting opportunities for people with disabilities. One recent study reported that people with disabilities were about 15 percent less likely to vote than those without disabilities—even after controlling for demographic and other factors related to voting—and suggested that voting behavior of people with disabilities is affected by access to polling places.<sup>32</sup> According to a recent analysis of Census data, nearly 1 out of 5 Americans has some type of disability, and more than 1 in 10 has a severe disability. For Americans 65 and over, 54.5 percent have a disability and 37.7 percent have a severe disability.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Douglas L. Kruse, Kay Schriener, Lisa Schur, and Todd Shields, *Empowerment Through Civic Participation: A Study of the Political Behavior of People With Disabilities*, Final Report to the Disability Research Consortium, Bureau of Economic Research, Rutgers University and New Jersey Developmental Disabilities Council (Apr. 1999). This study involved a national telephone survey of 1,240 Americans of voting age. The sample was based on a random selection of households and was stratified to include 700 people with disabilities.

<sup>33</sup>Jack McNeil, *Americans with Disabilities: 1997*. U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Reports (Feb. 2001), pp. 9, 11. Data used in this report are from 1997. An analysis of more recent data was not available as of July 2001.

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Such concerns about voting opportunities have prompted action on the part of policymakers and other interested parties. For example, members of the Congress recently proposed several amendments to the VAEHA that were intended to improve voting access.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the Election Center's National Task Force on Accessible Elections, composed of state and local election officials and representatives of disability organizations, met in 1999 and issued a guidebook to assist local election officials in improving voting access.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, following reports that elderly voters were unable to decipher ballots and that voting equipment created overcounts and undercounts in the 2000 election, members of the Congress and other policymakers have proposed a number of election reforms, including provisions for further improving voting access for people with disabilities.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the FEC has been working toward incorporating accessibility standards for electronic voting equipment into the update of its 1990 voluntary standards for computer-based voting equipment.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the IEEE-SA Standards Board has recently approved a project to develop a standard by which electronic voting equipment may be evaluated for, among other things, accessibility.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>S.511 sought to amend the VAEHA to ensure that all polling methods selected and used for federal elections are accessible to elderly voters and voters with disabilities.

<sup>35</sup>*Voting: A Constitutional Right for All Citizens—A Guidebook to Assist Election Officials to Achieve Equal Access for All Citizens to the Polling Place and the Ballot* was published in 1999 by the National Task Force on Accessible Elections, initiated by the Election Center. The guidebook was based on a previous document originally published in 1986 by the National Organization on Disability and updated in 1987 by the National Easter Seal Society.

<sup>36</sup>For example, H.R. 263, S.379, and S.565 call for the establishment of commissions to study or advise on, among other things, how to improve voting accessibility; and H.R.1151 directs the FEC to issue voluntary standards and make grants to improve the accessibility of voting. In addition, about 1,700 bills concerning election reform have been introduced in state legislatures around the country.

<sup>37</sup>The FEC 1990 standards address only computer-based systems; aside from electronic tabulation machines, they do not address paper or punch card ballots as used by the voter, or mechanical voting machines. The standards are voluntary; states are free to adopt them in whole or in part, or reject them entirely. As of Apr. 2001, 35 states have adopted at least some part of FEC's 1990 voting system standards. At this time, it cannot be known how many states will adopt FEC's revised standards.

<sup>38</sup>The IEEE-SA is the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc. Standards Association.

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## State Provisions and County Practices for Assuring Voting Accessibility Vary Widely

Considerable variation exists in how states and counties attempt to meet the needs of voters with disabilities, both at polling places and through alternative methods of voting. Consistent with the VAEHA, all states and the District of Columbia have established provisions that address voting accessibility at polling places. However, state provisions vary in a number of ways, including whether these provisions take the form of statute or regulation, which carry the force and effect of law, or whether they exist only in policy. Similarly, states and counties vary in how they select, inspect, and modify polling places to assure their accessibility. Finally, if some polling places are not or cannot be made readily accessible, all states have provisions for voters with disabilities to vote absentee either on or before Election Day. Many but not all states also have provisions for other alternative voting methods or accommodations to facilitate voting by people with disabilities on or before Election Day.

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## State Provisions for Addressing Accessibility of Polling Places Vary Widely

All states have laws and other provisions concerning voting access for people with disabilities, including their access to polling places, but the extent and manner in which these provisions promote accessibility vary from state to state. This variation is consistent with the VAEHA, which requires that states establish guidelines but does not prescribe what those guidelines should contain. We found that state provisions vary in several ways, including the type or nature of the voting access provision and whether they exist in statutes or regulations—which carry the force and effect of law—or in policy documents. For example, table 1 shows that 36 states have a statute or regulation stating that all polling places should be accessible, 7 states have a policy that requires or suggests that all polling places be accessible, and 8 states have no such provisions. Similarly, while some states have statutes or regulations covering Braille or large-type ballots or magnifiers for visually impaired voters, the majority of states have no such provisions. Overall, we found that some states have numerous provisions addressing voting and polling place accessibility, while some states have very few. (See app. IV, tables 9 and 10, for a detailed listing of each state’s provisions.)

**Table 1: State Provisions Concerning Accessibility of Polling Places**

| State provisions   | Number of states with provisions |                          | Number of states with no provision |
|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
|  | Statute or regulation            | Policy only <sup>a</sup> |                                    |
| <b>Voting accessibility</b>  |                                  |                          |                                    |
| Voting by people with disabilities explicitly addressed                    | 51                               | 0                        | 0                                  |
| <b>Polling place accessibility</b>   |                                  |                          |                                    |
| All polling places must/should be accessible                               | 36                               | 7                        | 8                                  |
| State provisions contain one or more polling place accessibility standards | 23                               | 19                       | 9                                  |
| Inspection of polling places to assess accessibility is required           | 15                               | 14                       | 22                                 |
| Reporting by counties to state on polling place accessibility is required  | 10                               | 10                       | 31                                 |
| <b>Voting booth areas and equipment</b>                                    |                                  |                          |                                    |
| Voting booth areas must/should accommodate wheelchairs                     | 17                               | 16                       | 18                                 |
| Voting systems must/should accommodate individuals with disabilities       | 13                               | 11                       | 27                                 |
| <b>Aids for visually impaired voters</b>                                   |                                  |                          |                                    |
| Braille ballot or methods of voting must/may be provided                   | 3                                | 3                        | 45                                 |
| Ballots with large type must/may be provided                               | 2                                | 2                        | 47                                 |
| Magnifying instruments must/may be provided                                | 7                                | 15                       | 29                                 |

<sup>a</sup>Policies for a particular provision were identified only if a state did not have either a statute or regulation for that provision.

Source: GAO analysis of statutes, regulations, and other written provisions in 50 states and the District of Columbia. Provision categories were identified based on our review of these legal and policy documents.

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Even when states have similar types of provisions, the extent to which the provisions promote access varies considerably. For example, while some states' statutes recommend that all polling places be accessible, other states require it without exception. In addition, some provisions are more explicit or exacting in promoting access than others. For example, according to one state's statutes, all voting systems acquired on or after September 1, 1999, must comply with Title II of the ADA and must provide a practical and effective means for voters with most types of physical disabilities to cast a secret ballot.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, another state's regulations require a large-handled stylus for punching the ballot.

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### Counties Are Generally Responsible for Assuring Polling Place Accessibility, but Practices Vary

Consistent with the VAEHA, we found that primary responsibility for assuring accessibility of polling places, through selecting, inspecting, and/or modifying polling places or voting systems, typically rests with counties or local governments. Although there are many similarities in how counties carry out their responsibilities, there are also some key differences in their approach and level of effort for assuring polling place accessibility. For example, although counties and local governments are generally responsible for selecting polling places, we estimate from our county survey that, in at least 27 percent of all counties, accessibility to people with disabilities is not cited among the criteria used in the selection process. Additionally, while all polling places in at least 68 percent of all counties are inspected by county or local governments to determine if they meet voting accessibility policies, the frequency of these inspections varies widely. Some polling places may be inspected as frequently as once a year, while others may only be inspected upon selection or after a complaint or remodeling. Moreover, in a few counties, polling places conduct their own inspections.

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<sup>39</sup>This state's requirements do not cover disabilities involving the combined and complete loss of both hearing and vision because, according to the state, the technology has not yet been developed that will allow a voter with this combination of disabilities to cast a secret ballot.

In addition, it is the county or local election office that is generally responsible for ensuring that polling places are accessible, such as by making and financing any polling place modifications and purchasing accessible voting equipment. Since 1995, in at least 32 percent of all counties, temporary or permanent modifications were made to polling places to improve their accessibility.<sup>40</sup> With respect to acquiring accessible voting equipment, county or local election officials in over 92 percent of all counties have the authority to decide the type of voting machines to be used. However, most states have established voting system standards with which counties must comply; some of these state standards require accommodations for individuals with disabilities, some do not.

While counties and local election officials typically have primary responsibility for assuring the accessibility of polling places, table 2 shows that states provide varying types of assistance.

**Table 2: State Practices in Assuring and Improving Polling Place Accessibility**

| <b>Practice</b>   | <b>Number of states</b> |
|---|-------------------------|
| Assuring accessibility  |                         |
| Provide counties with training or guidance                              | 25                      |
| Select or inspect polling places  | 5                       |
| Both  | 8                       |
| Neither   | 13                      |
| Financing improvements to accessibility                                 |                         |
| Help fund polling place modifications                                   | 3                       |
| Help fund new voting systems  | 9                       |
| Both  | 2                       |
| Neither   | 37                      |
| Responding to voter complaints  |                         |
| Help respond to voter complaints, including access complaints           | 42                      |
| No policies/procedures for filing or reviewing accessibility complaints | 9                       |

Source: Interviews with state election officials in 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Moreover, the amount of assistance provided by states can vary widely for similar types of assistance. For example, to assure accessibility of polling places, one state conducts an annual accessibility survey of polling places,

<sup>40</sup>Examples of temporary modifications include portable ramps and temporary signs to designate accessible parking areas and entryways for people with disabilities. Permanent modifications include curb cuts and paved parking lots to accommodate wheelchairs.

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provides inspection training for county officials, and performs inspections of polling places. In contrast, another state only offers guidance to local officials on how to comply with disability standards.

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### State Provisions and County Practices Regarding Alternative Voting Methods and Accommodations Vary

As shown in table 3, states provide alternative methods for voting on or before Election Day, but vary in the number and kind of alternatives and accommodations they make available to voters with disabilities. For example, in accordance with the VAEHA, all states allow absentee voting for voters with disabilities without notary or medical certification requirements.<sup>41</sup> However, the dates by which absentee ballots must be received vary considerably, with some states requiring that, to be counted, the ballot must be received before Election Day. In addition, 17 states permit permanent absentee voting, allowing voters with disabilities to receive absentee ballots on a continuing basis without reapplying for a ballot before each election. Further, 19 states have provisions for notifying voters in advance about the accessibility of their assigned polling places. Other accommodations that some, but not all, states allow include curbside voting; taking ballots to a voter's residence; and allowing voters to use another, more accessible polling location either on or before Election Day.<sup>42</sup> (See app. IV, table 10 for a detailed state-by-state listing of alternative voting methods provided.)

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<sup>41</sup>Some states do require that absentee voting ballots be witnessed by one or two persons. Also, some states that allow absentee ballots or applications to be sent automatically to voters with disabilities require a medical certificate to establish eligibility.

<sup>42</sup>Some states may not have provisions for certain accommodations or alternative voting methods because they require all polling places to be accessible.



**Table 3: State Provisions for Alternative Voting Methods and Accommodations**

| Methods and accommodations  | Number of states |              |
|---|------------------|--------------|
|   | Permitting       | No provision |
| Absentee voting by mail <sup>a</sup>  | 51               | 0            |
| Ballot due before Election Day  | 5                |              |
| Ballot due on Election Day  | 36               |              |
| Ballot may be received after Election Day <sup>b</sup>                          | 10               |              |
| Permanent absentee voting   | 17               | 34           |
| With restrictions <sup>c</sup>  | 10               |              |
| Without restrictions  | 7                |              |
| Curbside voting on Election Day <sup>d</sup>                                    | 28               | 19           |
| Ballot can be taken to voter's residence on or before Election Day <sup>e</sup> | 21               | 25           |
| Use of alternative, accessible polling place on Election Day                    | 27               | 24           |
| Early voting  | 39               | 12           |
| With provision requiring accessible location                                    | 16               |              |
| No provision regarding accessible location                                      | 23               |              |
| Advance notice of inaccessible polling place                                    | 19               | 32           |

Note: Some states may not have provisions for certain accommodations or alternative voting methods because they require all polling places to be accessible.

<sup>a</sup>See app. IV, table 10 for additional information on absentee voting, including absentee voting in person or by personal representative. Absentee voting provisions for overseas or military voters, and for emergencies, are not included in this analysis.

<sup>b</sup>Most of these states require ballots to be postmarked on or before Election Day.

<sup>c</sup>Examples of restrictions include medical certification requirements, or availability limited to voters with certain disabilities.

<sup>d</sup>Not included in the table are four states that prohibit curbside voting.

<sup>e</sup>Not included in the table are five states that prohibit taking a ballot to a voter's residence.

Source: GAO analysis of statutes, regulations, and other written provisions provided by election officials in 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Although states may offer similar types of voting alternatives and accommodations, wide variation exists in how these alternatives and accommodations are implemented. For example, one state requires that all registered voters be notified of the accessibility of their polling place by mail at least 21 days before the election. The notice must inform the voter of his or her right to curbside voting or to vote by absentee ballot. In comparison, another state only recommends that a list of accessible polling places be published in a newspaper no later than 4 days before the election.

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Finally, in states that have no provisions for particular alternative voting methods or accommodations, county and local government practices may vary. For example, in a number of states that have no provision for curbside voting, we found that some counties and local governments offer curbside voting and some do not. Similarly, in a number of states that lacked provisions for allowing voters to use an alternative voting place on Election Day, our county survey data showed that some counties and local governments offer this alternative and some do not.

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## Most Polling Places Have Features That May Impede Access, but Most Also Provide Accommodations That May Facilitate Voting

Voting access for people with disabilities may be impeded by a variety of physical features at polling places; however, accommodations to facilitate voting are often made available. Although the extent to which any given feature may prevent access is unknown, most polling places in the contiguous United States have one or more physical features that may pose challenges for voters with disabilities. These features include a lack of accessible parking and barriers en route from the parking area to the voting room. Figure 2 shows key features we examined. Such potential impediments can be found at all types of buildings, both public and private. Additionally, the voting methods and equipment used inside polling places may pose challenges for some voters with disabilities. However, polling places generally provide accommodations, such as curbside voting, voting stations designed for people with disabilities, and voter assistance inside the voting room.

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## Polling Place Facilities

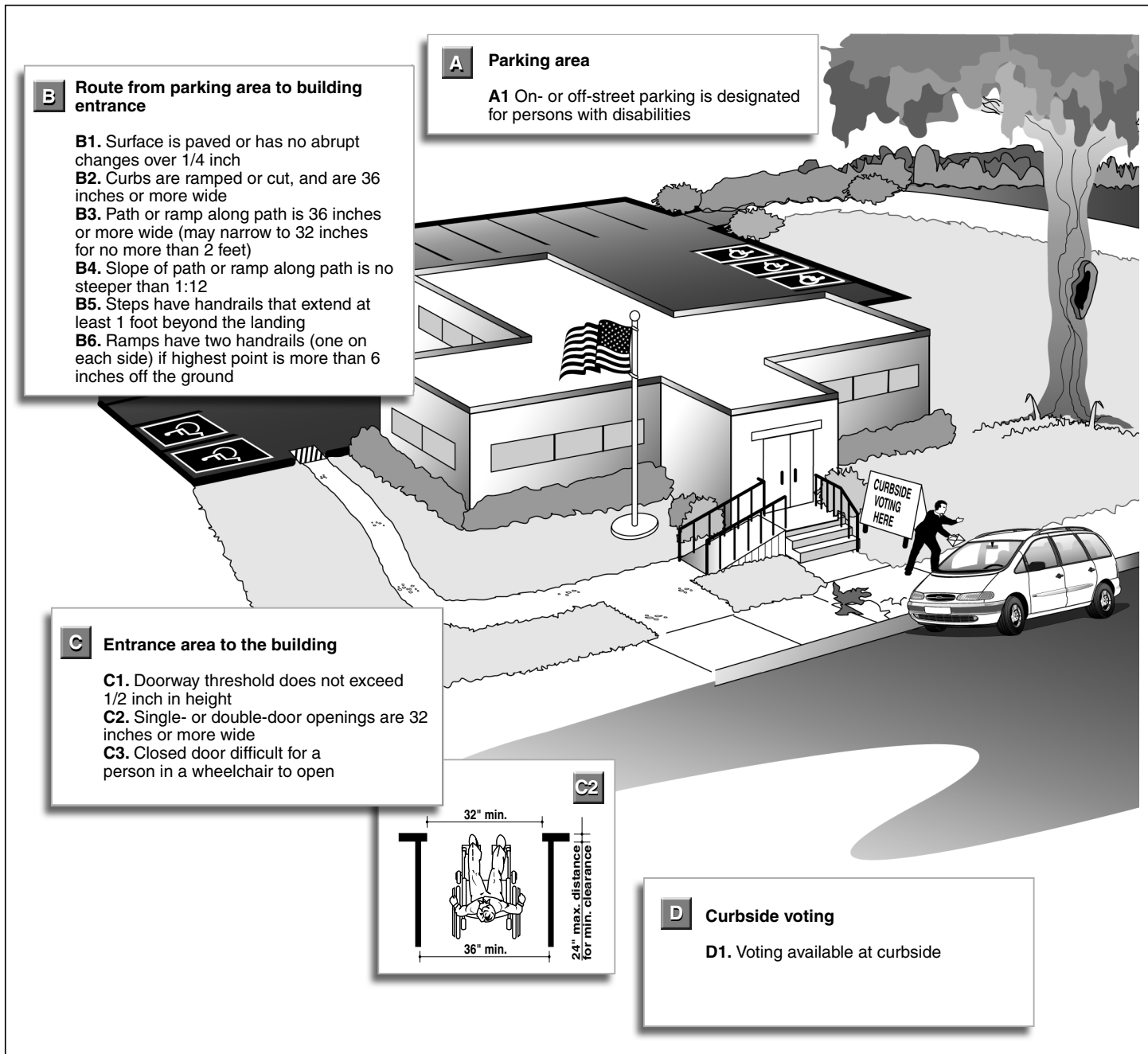
From our observations on Election Day, we estimate that, from the parking area to the voting room, 16 percent of all polling places in the contiguous United States have no potential impediments, 56 percent have one or more potential impediments but offer curbside voting, and 28 percent have one or more potential impediments and do not offer curbside voting.<sup>43</sup> (See fig. 3.) These potential impediments would primarily affect individuals with mobility impairments. Although curbside voting is not available at a number of polling places with potential impediments, as noted earlier, all states have provisions for absentee voting, and many states provide for other alternative voting methods or accommodations that may facilitate voting by people with disabilities on or before Election Day.<sup>44</sup>

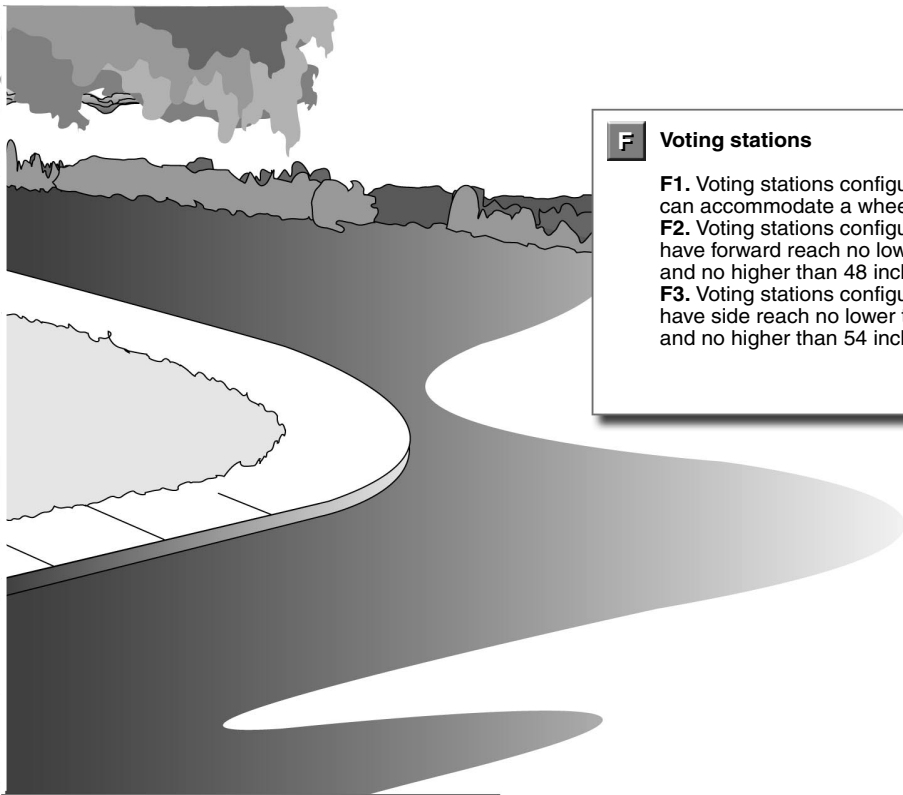
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<sup>43</sup>About 12 percent of all polling places have no potential impediments and offer curbside voting.

<sup>44</sup>For example, a number of states allow absentee ballots to be cast by mail on Election Day. In addition, some state laws and policies allow ballots to be taken to voters' residences on or before Election Day, or allow voters to cast their ballots at another location that is accessible on Election Day.

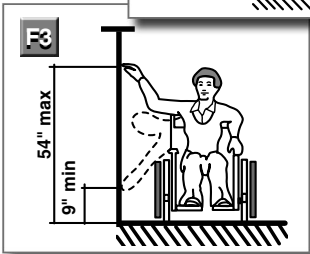
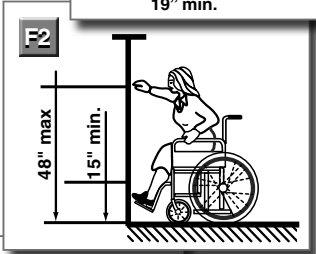
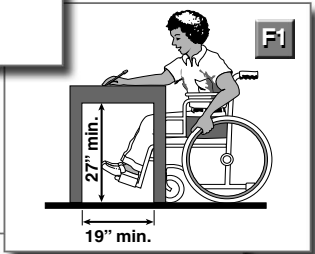
**Figure 2: Key Features at Polling Places**





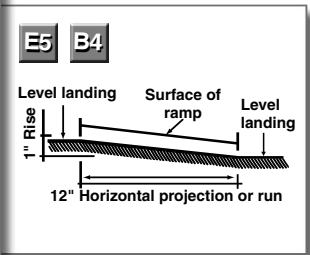
**F Voting stations**

**F1.** Voting stations configured for sitting can accommodate a wheelchair  
**F2.** Voting stations configured for standing have forward reach no lower than 15 inches and no higher than 48 inches  
**F3.** Voting stations configured for standing have side reach no lower than 9 inches and no higher than 54 inches

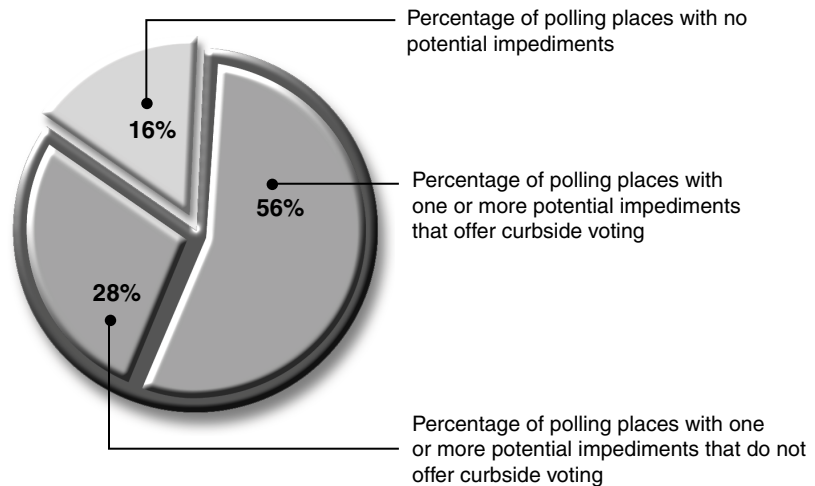


**E Route from inside the building entrance to the voting room**

**E1.** Doorway threshold does not exceed 1/2 inch in height  
**E2.** Single- or double-door openings are 32 inches or more wide  
**E3.** Steps are not required to reach the voting room  
**E4.** Corridors have clearances 36 inches or more wide (may narrow to 32 inches for no more than 2 feet)  
**E5.** Slope of ramp no steeper than 1:12



**Figure 3: Prevalence of Potential Impediments at Polling Places and Availability of Curbside Voting**



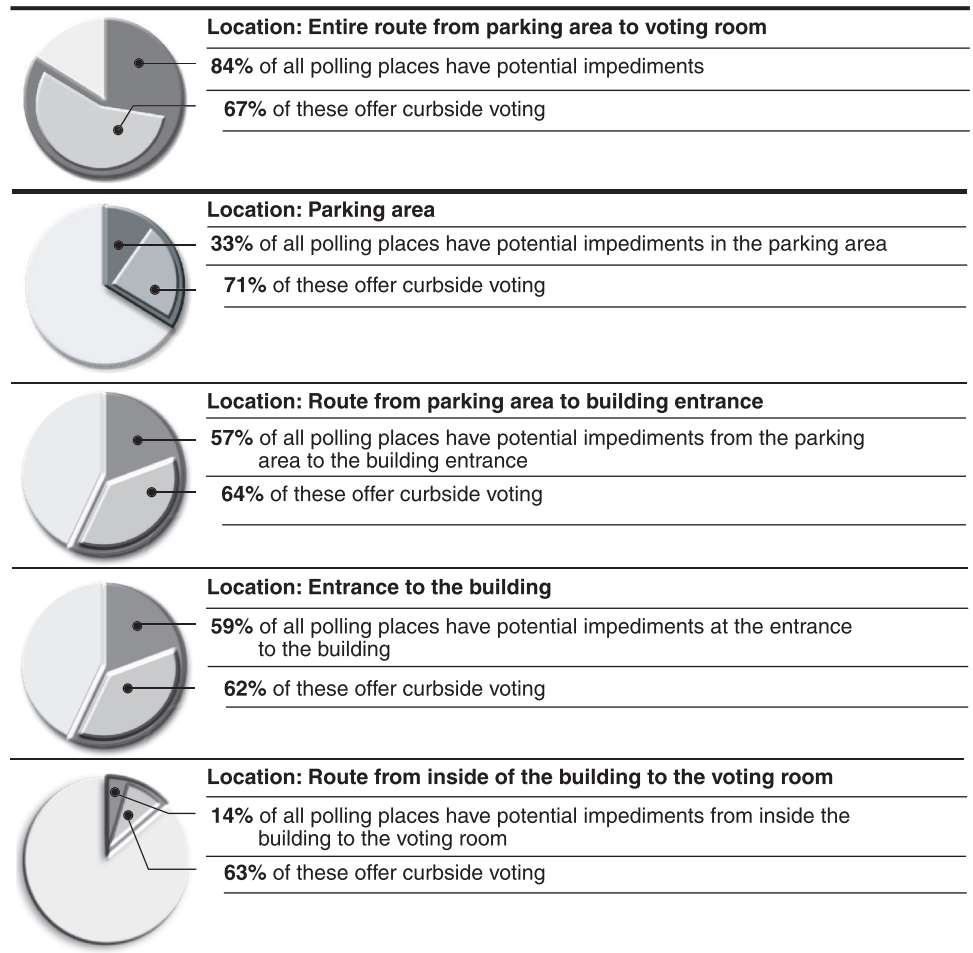
Note: These potential impediments are located along the route from the parking area to the voting room.

Source: GAO analysis of polling place data collected on Nov. 7, 2000.

As shown in figure 4, most polling places with potential impediments also offer curbside voting: of the 84 percent of polling places that have one or more potential impediments, 67 percent offer curbside voting. Figure 4 also shows that most of the potential impediments occur in two of the four location areas we examined—en route from the parking area to the building, and at the entrance of the building. For example, 57 percent of all polling places have some type of potential impediment from the parking area to the building, such as unpaved/poor surfaces, or paths or ramps with slopes that exceed the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines,<sup>45</sup> which could hinder the approach of a voter in a wheelchair. Appendix V contains a listing of some of the potential impediments in each location area.

<sup>45</sup>The 1991 Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities require that slopes on sidewalks/pathways or ramps rise no more than 1 inch over a 12-inch distance; that is, a slope no steeper than 1:12. The Guidelines are generally mandatory for new construction and for alterations of public buildings, places of public accommodations such as private schools, and commercial facilities. Places of worship are exempt.

**Figure 4: Percentage of Polling Places With Potential Impediments That Offer Curbside Voting<sup>a</sup>**



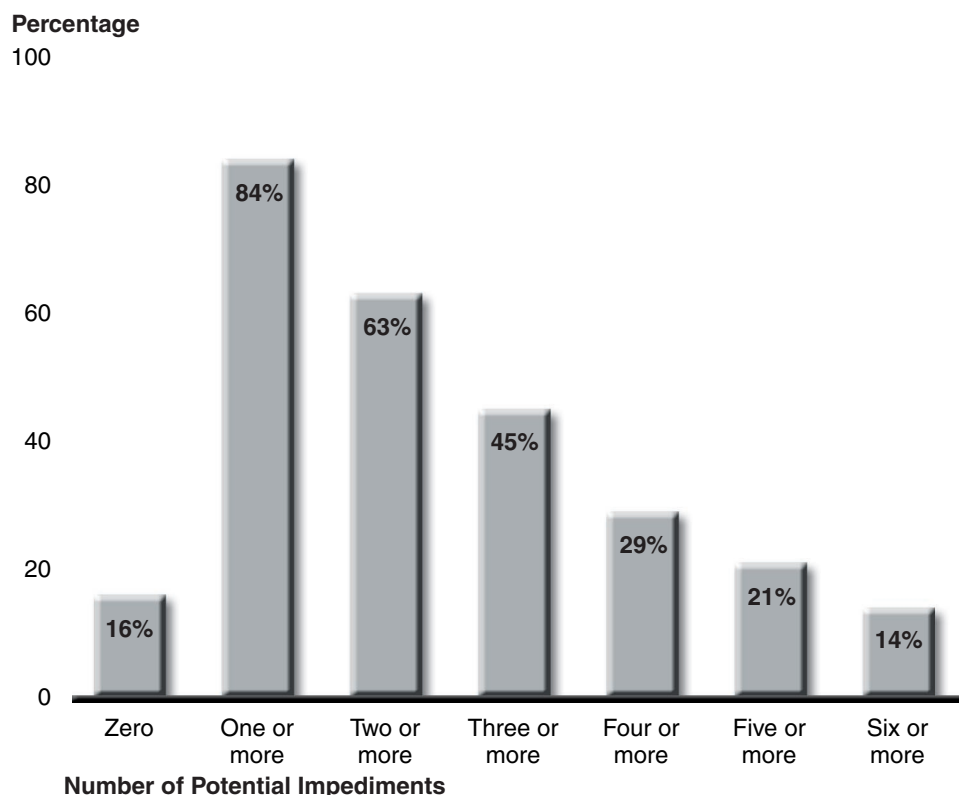
<sup>a</sup>Sampling errors on the percentages of polling places with potential impediments range from 4 to 8 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level; the sampling errors on the percentages of polling places offering curbside voting range from 10 to 16 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

Source: GAO analysis of polling place data collected on Nov. 7, 2000.

We also found that many polling places have more than one potential impediment, some of which occur in more than one location area. For example, figure 5 shows that 63 percent of all polling places have two or more potential impediments. Further, in the four location areas we examined, we found that 52 percent of polling places have potential impediments in more than one location area. A small percentage of all

polling places (5 percent) have a potential impediment in all four location areas.

**Figure 5: Percentage of All Polling Places by Number of Potential Impediments**



Notes: Thirteen was the maximum number of potential impediments we found at any one polling place. Sampling errors range from 4 to 8 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

Source: GAO analysis of polling place data collected on Nov. 7, 2000.

Our polling place data also show that potential impediments to access occur at fairly high rates regardless of the type of building used as a polling place. Table 4 shows that, for each type of building, 76 percent or more have potential impediments to voting access for people with disabilities.



**Table 4: Prevalence of Potential Impediments by Type of Building**

| Type of building                             | Percentage of all polling places | Percentage of buildings with at least one potential impediment |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| School                                       | 24%                              | 78%  |
| Library or recreational/<br>community center | 21%                              | 90%  |
| House of worship                             | 18%                              | 82%  |
| City/town hall or courthouse                 | 14%                              | 91%  |
| Police/fire station                          | 9%                               | 76%  |
| Private home                                 | 4%                               | 93%  |
| Other <sup>a</sup>                           | 10%                              | 78%  |

Note: Sampling errors for the types of buildings as a percentage of all polling places range from 3 to 6 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level; the sampling errors on the percentage of these buildings with potential impediments range from 8 to 15 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

<sup>a</sup>Includes National Guard Armories, lodges and fraternal organizations, apartment buildings, and private businesses.

Source: GAO analysis of polling place data collected on Nov. 7, 2000.

Moreover, about 70 percent of all polling places are in facilities—such as schools, recreational/community centers, city/town halls, police/fire stations, libraries, and courthouses—potentially subject to either Title II or III of the ADA, irrespective of their use as polling places.<sup>46</sup> Our polling place data show that, of the polling places located in these types of facilities, about 84 percent have one or more features that may present challenges to physical access for voters with disabilities.<sup>47</sup> Potential impediments found at these facilities include high door thresholds, ramps with steep slopes, and a lack of accessible parking. However, under the ADA, only new construction and alterations must be readily accessible, and we did not determine the date that polling place facilities were either constructed or altered. In addition, due to the number of possible

<sup>46</sup>As noted previously, Title II, Subtitle A, which applies to state and local governments, requires that public programs, services, and activities be accessible to individuals with disabilities (42 U.S.C. sections 12131 to 12134). Title III requires reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures to be made by public accommodations to achieve accessibility for people with disabilities (42 U.S.C. section 12182(b)). Also, new construction and alteration of existing facilities by state and local governments, public accommodations, and commercial facilities generally must be readily accessible to individuals with disabilities (42 U.S.C. section 12183(b)(2)).

<sup>47</sup>Sampling error of +/-6 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

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approaches for meeting ADA requirements on accessibility to public services and because places of public accommodation need remove barriers only where it is easy to do so, our data do not allow us to determine whether polling places with potential impediments would meet ADA requirements.

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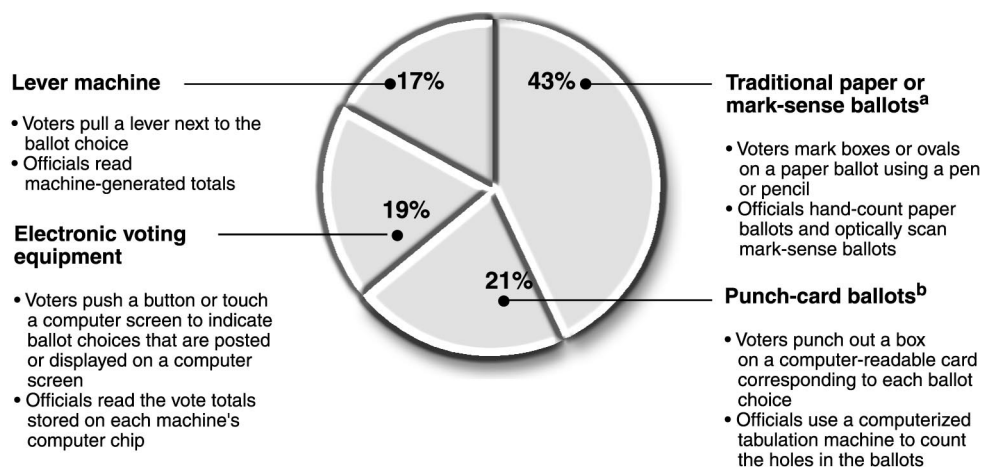
## Inside the Voting Room

Inside the voting room, many of the voting methods and the equipment used may prove challenging for voters with certain types of disabilities. Figure 6 shows that the use of ballots marked by a pen or pencil—traditional paper ballots and mark-sense ballots used with optical scanning equipment—is the most widespread voting method. This method is followed in prevalence by punch-card ballots, direct recording electronic (“electronic”) voting equipment, and lever machines. Table 5 details the potential challenges these methods may present to voters with visual or dexterity impairments.<sup>48</sup> In addition, voters in wheelchairs may have difficulty reaching and manipulating the handles on lever machines, and they also may find it difficult to reach and press the buttons on electronic voting equipment. Although electronic voting equipment may pose challenges for some voters with disabilities, some types of this method may be adapted with audio and other aids to accommodate a range of impairments.

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<sup>48</sup>We identified these challenges from interviews with election officials and representatives of disability organizations. We did not observe whether voters encountered difficulties using these methods.

**Figure 6: Voting Methods Used at Polling Places**



Note: Sampling errors range from 9 to 13 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

<sup>a</sup>According to 2000 Election Data Services data, about 3 percent of all precincts use traditional hand-counted paper ballots.

<sup>b</sup>We observed two types of equipment used with punch-card ballots: Votomatic and Datavote.

Source: GAO analysis of polling place data collected on Nov. 7, 2000.

**Table 5: Potential Challenges Posed by Various Voting Methods**

| Voting method               | Potential challenges for voters with  |  |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
|                             | Dexterity impairments   | Visual impairments   |
| Paper or mark-sense ballots | Holding the pencil or pen   | Reading the text on the ballots                                      |
| Punch-card ballots          | Pinpointing the stylus, or applying the appropriate amount of pressure to punch holes | Pinpointing the stylus, or reading the text on the ballots           |
| Electronic voting equipment | Pressing the buttons or images on the machine   | Reading the text on the screen or the machine                        |
| Lever machine               | Manipulating the handles to operate the machine                                       | Reading the text, or manipulating the handles to operate the machine |

Source: GAO interviews with election officials and representatives of disability organizations.

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For voters experiencing difficulties using these various voting methods, we found that one or more accommodations may be provided. Nearly all polling places allow voters to be assisted either by a friend or a poll worker.<sup>49</sup> Forty-seven percent of all polling places provide magnifying devices to assist voters with visual impairments.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, 51 percent of all polling places provide voting instructions or sample ballots in 18-point or larger type.<sup>51</sup> However, none of the polling places that we visited had special ballots or voting equipment adapted for blind voters, such as audiotaped ballots, or Braille ballots or sleeves.<sup>52</sup>

The configuration of voting stations, tables, or booths used in polling places may pose additional challenges for voters in wheelchairs. Fifty-two percent of all polling places have voting stations set up for people to sit and vote, 38 percent have stations set up for people to stand and vote, and 10 percent have stations set up for either seated or standing voting.<sup>53</sup> At voting stations configured for sitting, 43 percent do not have the minimum height, width, or depth dimensions to position a wheelchair under a table.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, many of the voting booths configured for standing have one or more features that might create an impediment for a voter in a wheelchair. For example, 51 percent of the booths configured for standing do not accommodate a voter in a wheelchair who has to reach forward to mark or cast a ballot, and 55 percent do not accommodate a person in a wheelchair who has to reach sideways to vote.<sup>55</sup> However, as noted earlier, nearly all polling places allow a friend or poll worker to assist with voting.

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<sup>49</sup>As noted previously, under the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as amended, voters requiring assistance to vote may be given assistance by a person of their choosing, such as a friend or an election official.

<sup>50</sup>Sampling error of +/-11 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

<sup>51</sup>Sampling error of +/- 11 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

<sup>52</sup>A Braille sleeve is an overlay that covers a ballot, or a sheath into which a ballot is inserted. The sleeve is aligned so that the Braille corresponds to the items on the ballot. A person marks through the sleeve in order to cast his/her vote.

<sup>53</sup>Sampling errors range from 5 to 11 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

<sup>54</sup>Sampling error of +/- 13 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

<sup>55</sup>Sampling errors for the side and forward-reach findings are +/-17 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

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## A Variety of Challenges Face States and Counties as They Work Toward Improving Access to Voting

Although a number of efforts have been made to improve voting access for people with disabilities, election officials cited a variety of challenges they face in trying to do so. Challenges cited by election officials include the limited availability of accessible buildings and the lack of authority to modify buildings to make them more accessible. Election officials also told us that the cost of acquiring voting equipment that is more accessible is another major challenge. Finally, election officials cited a number of legal, administrative, and operational challenges associated with implementing accommodations and voting alternatives that might make voting more accessible. Nevertheless, a number of states and counties have been successful at surmounting some of these difficulties.

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## Improving Polling Place Accessibility Hindered by the Lack of Accessible Buildings and Authority or Funds to Modify Them

Some counties find that a major challenge to improving polling place accessibility is a lack of accessible buildings, according to our national survey of county election officials. Comments from both state and county election officials indicate that problems finding accessible buildings can occur in both rural and urban locations. For example, in rural areas, the lack of buildings or the existence of rough terrain can create difficulties; whereas in cities, a lack of parking or the prevalence of older buildings that may be not accessible can be a problem.

However, even when accessible buildings exist in an area, election officials may lack the authority to use them. While some county election officials told us they had the authority to use public buildings as polling places, other officials indicated that they did not have this authority. Furthermore, states and counties generally lack the authority to require the owners of private buildings to make their buildings available for elections. According to our survey results, at least 26 percent of all counties find it difficult to provide accessible polling places because buildings are under the control of persons who do not want them to be used as polling places. In addition, while at least 86 percent of the counties can provide private building owners some compensation for the use of their buildings, the amount may be limited to paying janitorial costs or a small usage fee—sometimes less than \$100 per facility—which may not serve as a persuasive incentive.

One option for overcoming the limited supply of accessible buildings is to modify buildings, for example by installing ramps or widening doorways. While election officials have reported some success with this option, some indicated that their ability to make modifications has been impeded by authority limitations and funding constraints. For publicly held buildings,

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we found that the county or local election office has the authority to order permanent modifications to public polling places in less than one-third of the counties. For privately held buildings, election officials generally need the owners' permission to make temporary or permanent modifications. In addition, some state and county election officials indicated that funding constraints could also limit needed modifications. Despite these limitations, we estimate that, in at least 32 percent of all counties, one or more polling places may have been modified, either temporarily or permanently, since 1995 to improve accessibility. Furthermore, while election officials may not have the authority or funding to alleviate all accessibility problems, there may still be opportunities for some improvements, such as using signs to designate accessible parking and pathways.

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### Providing Accessible Voting Equipment Is Hindered by Funding Constraints and Concerns about Reliability and Security

Most state election officials told us that limited funding is one of the main barriers to improving voting accessibility, especially with regard to providing more accessible voting equipment. While some states may provide funds to ease this burden, according to our county survey, the county and local levels of government generally bear the cost for purchasing, leasing, or modifying voting equipment. Although a number of election officials and disability advocates we interviewed agreed that the new electronic voting equipment can accommodate a wider range of disabilities than other voting methods, they also expressed concern that it can be expensive, despite dramatic price reductions in the recent past.<sup>56</sup> At the time of our interviews, election officials estimated that each electronic voting unit can cost from \$3,000 to about \$6,000, with attachments to enable voting by people with various disabilities costing up to an additional \$1,000 per unit.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, competing priorities for funding at a local level may limit funding for improving voting accessibility, according to several election officials we interviewed. For example, counties needing road

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<sup>56</sup>Currently, a number of counties are looking to acquire new voting systems—electronic voting equipment or optical scanning systems. In comparing these systems, in addition to initial costs, counties would likely consider recurring costs (such as the cost of printing ballots, programming, training staff, operating and maintaining equipment, and storage) as well as other factors (such as reliability, security, voter accessibility, and ease of use and administration). An upcoming GAO report will provide information on the cost, security, efficiency, accuracy, and ease of use of voting systems.

<sup>57</sup>These attachments vary by manufacturer and might include audio features for voters who are blind or visually impaired, or features that would allow people with severe disabilities to vote using breathing or head movements.

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improvements may decide to pave roads rather than purchase or lease new voting equipment.

In addition to costs, concerns about the reliability and security of electronic equipment can discourage its adoption, according to election officials we interviewed. For example, without the traditional paper ballot to rely upon, some election officials fear that the equipment could be tampered with to produce unreliable or fraudulent election outcomes. One state official told us that several of the counties in his state that are accustomed to paper ballots do not want electronic voting machines, even if the state pays for them. Also state election official told us that some officials are concerned because this newer technology does not create traditional paper ballots and would not, therefore, allow for a standard ballot recount to verify the election outcome. However, newer electronic systems have enhancements that allow voters to confirm their selections and that improve the ability of election officials to verify election results.

Although some counties indicated that they had purchased or were considering the purchase of newer electronic voting equipment, a number have indicated that they had made improvements to their existing equipment to enhance voter accessibility. For example, some counties reported modifying existing voting machines—for example, by making them adjustable—so that individuals who need to vote in a sitting position can vote independently. Some counties using punch-card equipment reported providing a larger stylus to make it easier for those who could not grip or otherwise vote using a regular stylus. Also, some county officials told us that, upon request, they try to provide special aids—such as Braille sleeves for the paper ballot and an accompanying audiotape or Braille ballots—so that blind individuals can vote independently, although we did not observe such aids on Election Day.<sup>58</sup>

While incremental improvements to older voting technology may enable more people with disabilities to vote independently, some election officials and disability advocates we interviewed believe these measures have shortcomings. For example, according to spokespersons for national advocacy groups for people with disabilities, blind voters may not be comfortable with audiotapes because using them is time-consuming and

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<sup>58</sup>Special aids for the blind may not have been observed on Election Day because they may not have been requested in advance by voters in the polling places that we visited or the local poll workers we interviewed may not have been aware of these aids.

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does not allow them to independently confirm that they marked their ballots correctly. Moreover, only a small percentage of blind individuals have the Braille proficiency needed to vote using a Braille ballot. In addition, some voters with severe dexterity problems may not be able to mark their ballots even with a larger punching stylus or special writing implement.

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### Alternative Voting Methods and Accommodations Provide Options, but Also Present Access and Implementation Challenges

Expanding the availability of alternative voting methods or accommodations can provide voters with additional options, but implementing these changes can present election officials with legal, administrative, and operational challenges. For example, expanding the use of curbside voting could allow more voters with disabilities to cast their votes at neighborhood polling places on Election Day. For election officials, implementing curbside voting requires having staff trained and available to assist voters outside the polling place. Moreover, in some states where curbside voting is either prohibited or not currently used, policymakers would need to be convinced that providing this accommodation would not increase the potential for fraud as a result of ballots being taken out of the polling place facility. Disability advocates told us that this accommodation and other alternatives represent important and needed options for some voters with disabilities; at the same time, advocates believe that such alternatives do not provide an equal opportunity to vote in the same manner as the general public and should not be viewed as permanent solutions for inaccessible polling places.

Given the limited availability of accessible polling places, other options that could allow more voters with disabilities to vote at a polling place on Election Day include reassigning them to another, more accessible polling place or creating accessible superprecincts in which voters from more than one precinct would all vote in the same building. For voters with disabilities, reassignment to more accessible polling places may require them to travel farther to vote. For election officials, some challenges to reassigning voters are ensuring that they have notified the voter, trained poll workers, and provided an appropriate ballot at the reassigned location. In comparison, superprecincts could inconvenience many voters by requiring extra travel for those whose polling place was relocated. The challenge in creating a superprecinct that is also accessible is finding an accessible facility of sufficient size and amenities to meet the needs of a large number of voters.



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In addition, some alternatives and accommodations allow individuals to vote before Election Day, including voting in person at early voting sites or using less restrictive absentee voting options, such as “no excuse” or permanent absentee voting.<sup>59</sup> Some voters may prefer voting before Election Day because it provides greater flexibility and convenience. For example, some voters with disabilities may want to use an absentee voting alternative and may find permanent absentee voting more convenient than reapplying every election. However, the various limitations and requirements of these voting options, such as traveling to an early voting site or providing a doctor’s certification to qualify for permanent absentee voting, may discourage the use of these options by some voters with disabilities whose only obstacle to voting as others do is an inaccessible polling place. For election officials, establishing early voting sites and expanding the number of absentee voters add to the cost and complexity of running an election. In addition, some election officials told us that policymakers in their states are reluctant to adopt or expand voting options—for example, to allow permanent absentee voting—because they fear it may increase the risk of fraud. At the same time, these options have been adopted by a number of states. A unique early voting option chosen by Oregon’s voters is universal vote-by-mail. While there were challenges in implementing this method, such as establishing uniform statewide voting procedures, there have also been benefits, such as reducing the cost of holding an election, according to an Oregon election official.

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<sup>59</sup>“No excuse” absentee voting is available to all voters—that is, voters do not need to give a reason to vote absentee.

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Internet voting—an alternative that has been only used on a limited basis to date—also presents increased participation opportunities and implementation challenges.<sup>60</sup> Internet voting could potentially provide voters the convenience of voting from remote locations, such as their homes, and thereby provide another option for increasing voter participation. However, numerous election officials and others have expressed concerns about the security and reliability of the Internet and lack of widespread access to it. To resolve these issues, task force studies have suggested that Internet voting could be introduced in phases.<sup>61</sup>

Appendix VI provides a summary of the wide assortment of issues and challenges for each voting accommodation and alternative method discussed above.

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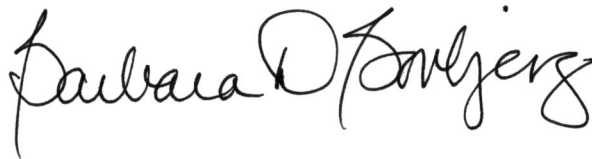
<sup>60</sup>There have been several Internet voting pilots and demonstrations in the last 2 years, including (1) the Republican Party straw poll in Alaska; (2) the Presidential Primary in Thurston, Washington; (3) the Democratic Party Primary in Arizona; and (4) the Presidential Election, in which the Department of Defense piloted on-line voting for about 100 personnel from the states of South Carolina, Florida, Texas, and Utah. In other pilot tests, four counties in California held on-line voting demonstrations prior to Election Day and one county in Arizona held them on Election Day.

<sup>61</sup>These phases might include first offering Internet voting only at polling places, where election officials could better ensure the security and reliability of the connection, and then expanding it to kiosks and other remote locations. See California Internet Voting Task Force, *A Report on the Feasibility of Internet Voting* (Jan. 2000); and Internet Policy Institute, *Report of the National Workshop on Internet Voting: Issues and Research Agenda* (Mar. 2001).

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We are sending copies of this report to the Department of Justice, the Federal Election Commission, the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (the Access Board), appropriate congressional committees, and other interested parties. We will also make copies available to others on request. If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please call me or Carol Dawn Petersen, Assistant Director, at (202) 512-7215. Staff acknowledgements are listed in appendix VII.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara D. Bovbjerg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "B".

Barbara D. Bovbjerg  
Director, Education, Workforce,  
and Income Security Issues

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# Scope and Methods

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This appendix provides more detail about the procedures used to conduct our legal analysis, collect information from states and counties, and select our sample of polling places. It also provides more information about the final sample of polling places that was used in our analysis, as well as details about the analysis itself.

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## Analysis of State Laws and Written Policies

Our review of state provisions for assuring voting accessibility included a review of laws (statutes and regulations) and written policies related to accessibility of polling places and alternative voting methods and accommodations.

With respect to polling place accessibility, our review focused on state provisions concerning accessibility standards, inspection and reporting requirements, voting booth and system accommodations, and aids for voters with visual impairments. With respect to alternative voting methods and accommodations, our review focused on state provisions concerning early voting and absentee voting (including methods and deadlines), permanent absentee voting (including restrictions), curbside voting, taking ballots to voters' residences, assigning voters to more accessible polling places, and notifying voters in advance of inaccessible polling places.

To identify relevant laws and written policies, we first interviewed appropriate election officials in 50 states and the District of Columbia to discuss their laws and policies concerning polling place accessibility and alternative voting methods. We asked these officials to provide us with legal citations to laws and copies of written policies on any state policies they identified. In addition to the information provided by state election officials, we researched legal databases and the Internet to identify any additional state statutes, regulations, and written policies concerning polling place accessibility or alternative voting methods or accommodations. We did not include emergency provisions or provisions applicable only to military, out-of-state, or overseas voters.

To determine a state's provisions concerning polling place accessibility or alternative voting methods or accommodations, we first reviewed state statutes. If state statutes did not specifically address the issue, we then reviewed any applicable regulations. In the absence of an applicable statute or regulation, we reviewed written policies and guidelines we identified and collected or had been provided by the state. After determining each state's provisions, and whether the provisions were based in state law or written policy, we shared our determinations with

each state election office. We reviewed changes suggested by state election offices, reviewed any additional documents submitted, and adjusted our determinations where appropriate. We generally deferred to interpretations by a state of its own statutory or regulatory provisions. However, as a rule, we did not include policies or practices that were not supported by a written document.

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## Data Collection From States, Counties, and Selected National Organizations

To identify efforts and challenges to improving voting accessibility for people with disabilities, we interviewed election officials in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, as well as in our statistical sample of 100 counties.<sup>1</sup> We also interviewed selected representatives of national organizations representing states, counties, and people with disabilities to obtain their views on the costs of accessible equipment and the extent to which alternative voting methods and accommodations improve access for voters with disabilities. We did not independently verify the information provided by election officials or organization representatives through our interviews.

Our interviews of election officials in the 50 states and the District of Columbia focused on state laws concerning absentee voting requirements, as well as laws, regulations, and written policies concerning voting access for people with disabilities. We also asked for information about the state's role in assuring compliance with state policy, or providing or controlling resources for assuring compliance. Other topics covered in the interview were the state's role in making polling places accessible, the voting systems used in the state, any efforts initiated by the states to increase voting access for people with disabilities, and whether they perceived any barriers or constraints to such efforts.

For the 100 counties, we generally contacted county election officials because in most states responsibility for conducting elections is entrusted to them. However, in four counties we contacted election officials at a subcounty level, such as towns and cities, where the responsibility for elections resides. We then combined their responses to create county level responses.

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<sup>1</sup>Selection of the counties is discussed in the next section on selection of polling places.

In contacting the 100 counties we intended to visit on Election Day, we generally conducted two interviews—one before Election Day and one after. The first interview was designed to alert appropriate election officials to the nature of our inquiry and to ask for their cooperation so that we could visit polling places in their counties on Election Day.<sup>2</sup> We also asked for information about county laws or policies on voting access for people with disabilities, as well as county practices such as assessment and inspection of polling places, choice of buildings to be used as polling places, choice of voting methods and machines, and efforts for improvements in accessibility.

Our second interview with county and local election officials was conducted after Election Day and was designed to collect more information about county practices in selecting polling places, obtaining and using voting equipment, and handling voter complaints, as well as accessibility of polling places and voting methods in the county and steps the county may take when a polling place is not accessible. In addition, we asked for information about types of facilities used in conducting an election and resources for meeting accessibility standards and improving accessibility. We also asked for information about voter participation, extent of polling place resources, and officials' opinions about major barriers and constraints to improving accessibility to voting for people with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

For our interviews with election officials from states and counties, we used three data collection instruments (DCIs) to ensure that questions were asked, and responses were documented, in a consistent manner. The DCIs—one for the state interviews and two for the county interviews—were developed in consultation with GAO methodologists. To further ensure reliable and accurate results, the DCIs were administered by GAO staff who were trained to administer them.

Our interviews with selected representatives of national organizations were designed to collect more in-depth information on the cost and challenges of acquiring more-accessible voting equipment, and on the challenges and benefits of implementing alternative voting methods and

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<sup>2</sup>Some interviews with county officials before Election Day covered only the logistics of our visits, and in these cases all other questions were covered in the second interview.

<sup>3</sup>Some counties were unable to respond to some of our questions; the data from these questions therefore yielded inconclusive results and are not included in this report.

accommodations. GAO staff asked each representative the same set of questions to ensure we obtained comprehensive and balanced views on each issue.

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## Selection of Polling Places

Our selection of a sample of polling places used what is known as a two-stage sampling method. The first stage was the selection of a sample of counties. Each of those counties was then treated as a “cluster” of polling places. In the second stage, we selected a sample of polling places from each cluster.

Because there is no central list of all of the polling places in the United States, the first stage of our sampling method started with a list of all counties, since most elections are administered at the county level.<sup>4</sup> For cost and efficiency reasons we confined our list of counties to those in the contiguous United States, thus excluding the states of Alaska and Hawaii. We also excluded the state of Oregon because, since 1998, elections in that state have been conducted almost exclusively by mail. The final number of counties from which we sampled was 3,074. Because the unit of analysis we were ultimately interested in was the polling place, we used a probability proportional to size sampling method to select the counties. We wanted to base the probability that a particular county would be selected on the number of polling places in that county, so that counties with many polling places would be more likely to be selected than counties with few. Since information on the number of polling places in each county is not readily available, we based our selection of counties on the size of the voting-age population of each county (age 18 and over), with more-populous counties more likely to be selected than less-populous counties. We considered the voting-age population to be an acceptable correlate to the number of polling places. We therefore arranged our list of counties so that, for each county, the probability of selection would be proportional to the size of its voting-age population. We then randomly selected, without replacement, 100 counties from that list.

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<sup>4</sup>To identify counties we used the Census Bureau’s *Population Estimates for Counties by Age and Sex: Annual Time Series* (1998). From this database we pulled the Federal Information Processing Standard codes for counties and other entities treated as legal and/or statistical subdivisions. The following entities are listed by the U.S. Census Bureau as equivalent to counties: parishes in Louisiana; the District of Columbia; and the independent cities in Maryland, Missouri, Nevada, and Virginia.

The second stage of our sampling method involved selecting from each county the specific polling places to be visited. Once the 100 counties were selected, we contacted county election officials and asked for the most recent listing of all polling places in each.<sup>5</sup> From each county list, we randomly selected eight polling places for a total sample of 800 polling places. These 800 polling places were located in 33 states. Our sampling method produced a representative sample of polling places in the contiguous United States. To preserve the integrity of the data collection effort, the selected polling place locations were not disclosed prior to Election Day. Sampling errors for the polling place data generally range between 3 and 10 percentage points.<sup>6</sup>

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## Description of Site Visits and the Data Collection Instrument

On Election Day, GAO deployed one- or two-person “teams” composed of experienced GAO staff to counties in our sample. Each team was equipped with a DCI on which to record their observations; a measuring tape; and the “ADA Accessibility Stick II™,” a tool designed to measure potential structural impediments in buildings and on walkways.<sup>7</sup> GAO monitored the activities of the teams throughout Election Day and provided advice by telephone from our Washington, D.C., and San Francisco offices.

To ensure uniform data collection across the country, all teams received training in the use of the ADA Accessibility Stick II™ and the proper way to fill out each question on the DCI. Teams were instructed on how to interview the poll worker in charge of each polling place about accommodations for voters with disabilities and were instructed to review their responses with them.<sup>8</sup> Teams also received instructions on the appropriate times for visiting polling places and were instructed not to

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<sup>5</sup>In the states where elections were administered at the township level, we contacted all townships within the selected county and asked for their listings of polling places. In some cases we found polling place lists on county or township Web sites.

<sup>6</sup>Sampling errors for the county-level data had a wider range (generally between 4 and 25 percentage points) than the errors associated with the national polling place data because we used a probability proportional to size sampling method to select the counties.

<sup>7</sup>The ADA Accessibility Stick II™ is supplied by Access, Inc., Lawrence, Kan.

<sup>8</sup>In addition, if the teams did not locate an accessible parking area, route, entrance, or pathway, they were instructed to ask the poll worker in charge of the polling place whether one existed and, if so, to show it to them. The teams were instructed to then revise the DCI where appropriate.



approach voters or interfere with the voting process in any way during their visits.

Representatives appointed by the county election officials escorted many of the teams to the polling places. The escorts accompanied the teams to polling places, and facilitated access into the voting room. To maintain the integrity of the data collection process, GAO teams were instructed not to disclose the location of the selected polling places ahead of time.<sup>9</sup>

Due to constraints of time and geography, some teams were not able to visit all eight polling places in their assigned county. We preserved the randomness of our sample, however, by having the teams visit the polling places in the same order in which they were pulled from the sample. That is, each team was given an ordered list of polling places to visit and was expected to follow the order number in making their visits. If for some reason a polling place in a particular county was skipped, all polling places farther down that list were dropped from the sample. Thus, for example, polling site number five was not included in the final sample unless polling sites one through four had also been visited.

In addition, some counties did not allow us to visit their polling places on Election Day itself, but made the sites available to us on an alternative date. Ultimately, all teams visited at least three and as many as eight polling places. In total, we visited 496 polling places in 85 counties on Election Day and another 89 polling places in 15 counties either before or after Election Day.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>GAO teams disclosed the location of the polling places to the escorts on the morning of the site visits.

<sup>10</sup>See app. III for a list of the counties we visited.

The DCI we used is reproduced in appendix II. Most of the questions contained in this instrument incorporate access standards from the 1991 Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities,<sup>11</sup> the American National Standards Institute's (ANSI) Standard A117.1-1998: Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities,<sup>12</sup> and the ADA Guide for Small Towns from the Department of Justice (DOJ).<sup>13</sup> In addition, some of the questions in our instrument were based upon questions in an earlier access survey by the Federal Election Commission (FEC),<sup>14</sup> and upon guidelines published by the National Task Force on Accessible Elections.<sup>15</sup>

All DCI questions were carefully reviewed by GAO methodologists to ensure the questions would result in the collection of reliable and accurate data. We then provided copies of a draft version of our DCI to representatives of the Election Center, the National Organization on Disability, and the Task Force on Accessible Elections for their review and comments, but did not receive comments from these organizations. We also provided the Access Board with a copy of our draft instrument and they provided comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. Finally, to ensure that the instrument could be used effectively in the field and completed in a reasonable amount of time by the teams, we pretested the DCI twice—during the June 27, 2000, Special Election and the September 12, 2000, Primary Election—both in the District of Columbia.

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<sup>11</sup>The Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (otherwise known as the Access Board) is responsible for developing access guidelines for the design, construction, and alteration of buildings and facilities subject to the ADA. Although new amendments to the guidelines were proposed in 1998, they had not been approved and added to the standards enforceable by the Department of Justice by Nov. 7, 2000.

<sup>12</sup>The ANSI's Standard A117.1-1998 was created to allow a person with a physical disability to independently get to, enter, and use a site, facility, building, or element.

<sup>13</sup>U.S. Department of Justice, *ADA Guide for Small Towns*, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section (Apr. 2000).

<sup>14</sup>Federal Election Commission, Polling Place Accessibility Survey Form, *Polling Place Accessibility in the 1992 General Election*.

<sup>15</sup>The guidebook, *Voting: A Constitutional Right for All Citizens*, contains guidelines for making polling places and voting equipment accessible for people with disabilities. It was published in 1999 by the National Task Force on Accessible Elections, initiated by the Election Center. The guidebook was based on a previous document originally published in 1986 by the National Organization on Disability and updated in 1987 by the National Easter Seal Society.

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## Analysis of Election Day Data

In analyzing the data collected on Election Day, we first grouped the types of impediments that could be encountered at a polling place into those that might be encountered at each of four locations—the parking area, the route from the parking area to the building, the building entrance, and the route from the entrance to the voting room. Therefore, the percentage of polling places cited as having one or more potential impediments was based on whether or not a polling place was found to have at least one potential impediment in any of the four locations we examined and does not include potential impediments associated with the voting booth or equipment, which we report on separately.

While features of the voting booth or equipment did not enter into our summary measure of whether a polling place had a potential impediment, we did look for potential impediments inside the voting room. We took measurements of the voting booth or table used by people with disabilities to determine whether equipment was within reach for wheelchair users and whether wheelchairs could fit inside the booth or under the table. We checked to see if sample ballots and voting instructions were provided in 18-point type, and if magnifying devices were available. Further, we checked whether Braille ballots and sleeves, audiotaped ballots, and other accommodations for blind voters were available. We also briefly interviewed the poll worker in charge at almost all of the polling places to find out whether curbside voting was available and how the poll workers would handle voter requests for assistance from a friend or an election official.<sup>16</sup>

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## Comparison of Non-Election Day Sample With Election Day Sample

In the 15 counties that did not give us access to their polling places on Election Day, we were able to complete only those portions of our DCI that referred to the outside of the building. That is, we observed the parking area and the route from the parking area to the building. However, because we were not at the polling places on Election Day itself, we could not observe temporary features that might have been provided to facilitate the building's use as a polling place, such as temporary signs or ramps. More important, we could not determine what accommodations, if any, were available to voters with disabilities if they were to encounter features that impeded their access to the polling place on Election Day itself. For this reason, although we visited 89 polling places in these counties either before

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<sup>16</sup>We were unable to conduct this interview in 2.5 percent of polling places.

or after Election Day, we excluded the data from these visits from our analysis. We reweighted our final sample to account for the exclusion of these polling places so that our findings regarding various polling place features can still be considered representative of all polling places in the contiguous United States.

When we compare the limited data from the non-Election Day visits with those from the Election Day visits, it is clear that the exclusion of the non-Election Day data does not increase the percentage of polling places with a potential impediment in the parking area or on the route from the parking area to the building. The percentage of polling places in the non-Election Day sample with one or more potential impediments in these areas is higher than the percentage in the Election Day sample. While it is impossible to compare the entire route from parking to inside the building across the two sets of data, we found nothing to suggest that the non-Election Day sites would have had significantly fewer impediments than those found at the Election Day sites. Table 6 presents the percentage of polling places visited on Election Day and not on Election Day that had potential impediments either in the parking area or on the route to the building’s entrance.

**Table 6: Comparison of Election Day and Non-Election Day Data: Percentage of Polling Places With Potential Impediments in Two Areas**

|                        | Parking area | Route from parking area to building entrance |
|------------------------|--------------|--|
| Election Day sites     | 33%          | 57%  |
| Non-Election Day sites | 38%          | 73%  |

Note: Sampling errors for the Election Day sites range from 7 to 8 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level. Sampling errors for the Non-Election Day sites range from 15 to 20 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

Source: GAO analysis of polling place data.

## Sampling Errors

All sample surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the extent to which the survey results differ from what would have been obtained if the whole universe had been observed. Measures of sampling error are defined by two elements—the width of the confidence interval around the estimate (sometimes called precision of the estimate) and the confidence level at which the interval is computed. The confidence interval refers to the fact that estimates actually encompass a range of possible values, not just a

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single point. This interval is often expressed as a point estimate, plus or minus some value (the precision level). For example, a point estimate of 75 percent plus or minus 5 percentage points means that the true population value is estimated to lie between 70 percent and 80 percent, at some specified level of confidence.

The confidence level of the estimate is a measure of the certainty that the true value lies within the range of the confidence interval. We calculated the sampling error for each statistical estimate in this report at the 95-percent confidence level and present this information throughout the report.

# Polling Place Accessibility Data Collection Instrument

DCI to Assess Polling Place Accessibility

**Background Information**

1. Date \_\_\_\_\_, 2000
2. Time of Visit: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_
3. Name of Observer(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Name of HQ's Team or Region \_\_\_\_\_
5. Is this location still a polling place? (CHECK ONE.)
  1.  Not an "Election Day" visit (CONTINUE WITH DCL)
  2.  Yes
  3.  No (**STOP HERE AND GO TO THE NEXT POLLING PLACE!**)
6. What is the building in which the polling place is located normally used as? (CHECK ONE.)
  1.  House of worship (e.g., church, parish, synagogue, mosque, temple)
  2.  School
  3.  Library
  4.  Courthouse
  5.  Police or fire station
  6.  Recreational or community center
  7.  City Hall
  8.  Private home
  9.  Other (PLEASE SPECIFY.)  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Appendix II  
Polling Place Accessibility Data Collection  
Instrument**

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**Parking**

7. Is there temporary or permanent on or off street parking associated with this polling site that is specifically designated for persons with disabilities? (CHECK ONE.)
1.  Yes, designated parking that is permanent only
  2.  Yes, designated parking that is temporary only
  3.  Yes, both temporary and permanent designated parking
  4.  No designated parking for persons with disabilities (IF CHECKED, GO TO ITEM 10.)
  5.  No parking for any voters (IF CHECKED, GO TO ITEM 10.)
8. Is the parking specifically designated for persons with disabilities on or off street parking, or is there both? (CHECK ONE.)
1.  On street only
  2.  Off street only
  3.  Both on and off street parking
9. If the parking area specifically designated for persons with disabilities was not easily visible from the front of the polling place, was there a temporary or permanent sign directing voters to that parking area? (CHECK ONE.)
1.  Yes, a temporary sign only
  2.  Yes, a permanent sign only
  3.  Yes, both temporary and permanent signs
  4.  No, there was no sign
  5.  Not applicable, parking area was easily visible

**Appendix II  
Polling Place Accessibility Data Collection  
Instrument**

**Route from Leaving the Car to the Accessible Entrance of the Building**

**10.** What impediments to wheelchair use, if any, are there along the path from the point at which persons with disabilities leave their car to the "accessible" entrance (or main entrance if no accessible entrance designated) of the building? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

Parking Area or Street in Front of Building

1.  Unpaved or poor surface, e.g. abrupt changes over ¼ inch
2.  One or more unramped or uncut curbs
3.  One or more ramped or cut curbs that are less than 36 inches wide
4.  Other (PLEASE SPECIFY.)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Path from Parking Area or Street in Front of Building to the Entrance of the Building

5.  Overly narrow (less than 36 inches wide, but can go down to 32 inches wide for a distance of two feet) sidewalk/pathway along the path
6.  For at least part of the way there is no sidewalk/pathway
7.  Sidewalk/pathway has at least one slope that is steeper than 1:12
8.  Leaves, snow, or litter creating a hazard or impediment
9.  Steps required to reach building entrance (i.e., no ramps or lifts available)
  - a.  Steps have handrails that extend at least one foot beyond the landing
  - b.  Steps have handrails that extend less than one foot beyond the landing
  - c.  Steps have no handrails
10.  Ramps along main or accessible path have a slope steeper than 1:12
11.  Ramps that measure more than 6 inches from the ground to their highest point and lack 2 handrails (i.e. one on each side)
12.  Ramps that are less than 36 inches wide (can go down to 32 inches wide for a distance of two feet)
13.  Other (PLEASE SPECIFY.)  
\_\_\_\_\_
14.  **No impediments**



**Appendix II  
Polling Place Accessibility Data Collection  
Instrument**

**11.** If there was a special path for persons with disabilities that was different from the path that non-disabled persons would generally use, was there a temporary or permanent sign(s) clearly indicating that route? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes, a temporary sign only
2.  Yes, a permanent sign only
3.  Yes, both a temporary and a permanent sign
4.  No, there was no sign clearly indicating that route
5.  Not applicable, there was no special path

**Entrances to the Building**

**12.** What, if any, impediments to wheelchair use are presented by the entrance(s) to the building to which the "accessible" path (or main path if no "accessible" path designated) from the parking area leads? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

1.  Doorway thresholds that exceed ½ inch in height
2.  Single door openings that are less than 32 inches wide
3.  Double door openings that are less than 32 inches wide, including situations in which one of the doors cannot be opened
4.  Closed doors that would be difficult for a person in a wheelchair to open (PLEASE DESCRIBE.)  
\_\_\_\_\_

5.  Other (PLEASE SPECIFY.)  
\_\_\_\_\_

6.  **No impediments**

**13.** Were you allowed into the polling place? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes
2.  No (**STOP HERE AND GO TO THE NEXT POLLING PLACE!**)

**Appendix II**  
**Polling Place Accessibility Data Collection**  
**Instrument**

**Route to Voting Room from Inside the Building**

**14.** Once you have entered the building, what impediments, if any, are there to wheelchair use along the path to the voting room? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

Doorways and Entrances that Present Impediments

1.  One or more doorway thresholds that exceed ½ inch in height
2.  One or more single door openings that are less than 32 inches wide
3.  One or more double door openings that are less than 32 inches wide, including situations in which one of the doors cannot be opened
4.  One or more closed doors that would be difficult for a person in a wheelchair to open (PLEASE DESCRIBE.)  
\_\_\_\_\_

5.  Other (PLEASE SPECIFY.)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Steps

6.  Steps required to gain access to the voting room (i.e., no ramp or lift)
  - a.  Steps have handrails that extend at least one foot beyond the landing
  - b.  Steps have handrails that extend less than one foot beyond the landing
  - c.  Steps have no handrails

Ramps that Present Impediments

7.  One or more ramps that have a slope steeper than 1:12
8.  One or more ramps rising more than 6 inches that lack 2 handrails (i.e., one on each side)
9.  One or more ramps that are less than 36 inches wide at any point (but can go down to 32 inches wide for a distance of two feet)
10.  Other (PLEASE SPECIFY.)  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix II**  
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14. (Continued)

Corridors that Present Impediments

11.  One or more corridors that do not provide a clearance of at least 36 inches (can go down to a clearance of 32 inches for a distance of two feet)

12.  Other

\_\_\_\_\_

13.  **No impediments**

15. If there was a special path to the voting room for persons with disabilities that was different from the path that non-disabled persons would generally use, was there a temporary or permanent sign(s) clearly indicating that route? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes, a temporary sign only

2.  Yes, a permanent sign only

3.  Yes, both a temporary and a permanent sign

4.  No, there was no sign clearly indicating that route

5.  Not applicable, there was no special path

16. Is it necessary for a person in a wheelchair or a blind person to take an elevator to gain access to the voting room? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  No (IF "NO," GO TO QUESTION 18 ON PAGE 10.)

2.  Yes

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17. What impediments, if any, does the elevator present to blind persons or persons in a wheelchair? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

1.  The center of the outside call button is higher than 48 inches from the ground or floor
2.  The elevator opening is less than 36 inches wide
3.  The center of the top inside floor button(s) is higher than 48 inches from the floor of the elevator
4.  The panel surrounding the inside buttons lacked raised lettering or Braille
5.  Outside or inside elevator buttons require a heat sensor to operate, that is, the elevator buttons require human touch to operate (PLEASE TRY TO OPERATE BY PRESSING BUTTONS WITH A PEN OR SIMILAR OBJECT.)
6.  The inside car is less than 48" by 48"
7.  Other

\_\_\_\_\_

8.  **No impediments**

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**Voting Room Facilities for Persons with or without Disabilities**

**18.** What kind of voting method do voters **without** disabilities use? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Electronic
2.  Paper or mark-sense
3.  Votomatic punch card
4.  Datavote punch card
5.  Machine that uses levers to record vote
6.  Choice or combination of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
7.  Other

\_\_\_\_\_

**19.** What are the name of the manufacturer and the model number of the voting machines used by voters **without** disabilities?

Manufacturer\_\_\_\_\_

Model number\_\_\_\_\_

**20.** Are there one or more voting stations specifically designated for use by persons with disabilities? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes
2.  No (IF "NO," GO TO ITEM 24.)

**21.** Is a different type of voting method available to persons with disabilities? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes (DESCRIBE.)\_\_\_\_\_
2.  No

**22.** Are there different kinds of voting machines available to persons with disabilities? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes (DESCRIBE MAKE AND MODEL #.)\_\_\_\_\_
2.  No

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**23.** In your opinion, do the voting stations specifically designated for persons with disabilities provide less privacy than, the same privacy as, or more privacy than the voting stations designated for non-disabled voters? (CHECK ONE.)

- 1.  Less privacy than the voting stations for non-disabled voters
- 2.  The same privacy as the voting stations for non-disabled voters
- 3.  More privacy than the voting stations for non-disabled voters

**24.** Is the station at which a person with a disability would vote configured for voters to stand or sit? (CHECK ONE.)

- 1.  Stand (IF "STAND," GO TO ITEM 26 ON THE NEXT PAGE.)
- 2.  Sit

**25.** If the station at which a person with a disability would vote is configured for seated voting, is there clear knee space underneath that is 27 or more inches **high**, 30 or more inches **wide** and 19 or more inches **deep**? Is the equipment necessary for voting located 44 inches or less above the floor? (CHECK ONE FOR EACH.)

|   | <u>Yes</u><br>(1)        | <u>No</u><br>(2)         |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. 27" or more high                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. 30" or more wide                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. 19" or more deep                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Voting equipment 44" or less above the floor | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

(NOW GO TO ITEM 27.)

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26. If the station at which a person with a disability would vote is one in which non-disabled voters would usually stand, does the station have any of the impediments listed below?  
(CHECK ONE FOR EACH.)

|   | <u>Yes</u><br>(1) | <u>No</u><br>(2) |
|---|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. An entryway that is less than 36 inches wide   | [ ]               | [ ]              |
| 2. Thresholds that are more than ½ inch in the entryway   | [ ]               | [ ]              |
| 3. For a voter reaching forward to cast a vote, at least some of the buttons or levers are less than 15 inches above the floor  | [ ]               | [ ]              |
| 4. For a voter reaching forward to cast a vote, at least some of the buttons or levers are more than 48 inches above the floor  | [ ]               | [ ]              |
| 5. For a voter reaching sideways to cast a vote, at least some of the buttons or levers are less than 9 inches above the floor  | [ ]               | [ ]              |
| 6. For a voter reaching sideways to cast a vote, at least some of the buttons or levers are more than 54 inches above the floor | [ ]               | [ ]              |

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In the DCI used in the field, the bolded "18 point" text in questions 27, 28, 30 and 31 appeared in 18-point font size, in order that GAO staff could compare the font size of this text with that used in actual voting instructions and sample ballots.

**Aid for Visually Impaired Voters**

**27.** Are voting instructions posted that use **18-point** or larger type? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes, instructions posted with 18 point type or larger
2.  No

**28.** Are sample ballots posted that use **18-point** or larger type? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes
2.  No

**Questions for Main Precinct Official**

**29.** Are you able to interview the main precinct official? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes
2.  No (**STOP HERE AND GO TO THE NEXT POLLING PLACE!**)

**30.** Do you have voting instructions that use **18-point** or larger type that are available for voters to use? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes (If so, *ask*) May I see a set of those instructions?  Instructions Shown
2.  No

**31.** Do you have sample ballots that use **18-point** or larger type that are available for voters to use? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes (If so, *ask*) May I see one of those ballots?  Ballot Shown
2.  No

**32.** Does the polling place have magnifying devices available that visually impaired voters can use? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes (If so, *ask*) May I see the device (glasses.)?  Device Shown
2.  No



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**Appendix II**  
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**33.** Does the polling place have any special equipment available to enable a blind person to vote?  
(CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes
2.  No (IF "NO," GO TO ITEM 35.)

**34.** May I see the equipment that is available? (CHECK EACH SHOWN.)

1.  Braille sleeve
2.  Braille paper ballot
3.  Braille ballot as part of the voting device
4.  Audio-taped ballot
5.  Other (SPECIFY.)  
\_\_\_\_\_

**35.** If a blind person wishes to vote, may that person have a friend assist him or her with voting?  
(CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes
2.  No

**36.** If a person with a disability other than blindness, wishes to vote may that person have a friend assist him or her with voting? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes
2.  No

**37.** If a blind person asks for help with voting, will an election official assist him or her? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes
2.  No

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38. If a person with a disability, other than blindness, asks for help with voting, will an election official assist him or her? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes

2.  No

39. If a person with a disability arrives at the polling place in a car and believes that he or she would have difficulty entering or voting at the polling place, what would you do to enable the person to vote? (CHECK ALL THAT ARE INDICATED.)

1.  Provide assistance so that the person with a disability could vote in the polling place (ASK) What kind of assistance would you provide? (ENTER ANSWER.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2.  Enable the person to vote in his or her automobile by using the same kind of voting device as is used in the polling place

3.  Enable the person to vote in his or her automobile by using a paper ballot

4.  Other \_\_\_\_\_

40. (IF YOU CANNOT LOCATE ON OR OFF STREET PARKING DESIGNATED FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THAT IS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS POLLING PLACE ASK:) Is there on or off street parking associated with this polling site that is specifically designated for persons with disabilities that is either temporary or permanent? Would you show it to me? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes  Shown (IF NECESSARY, REVISE ANSWERS TO ITEMS 7-9.)

2.  No

41. (IF YOU CANNOT LOCATE AN ACCESSIBLE ROUTE FROM LEAVING THE CAR TO THE ENTRANCE OF THE VOTING ROOM ASK:) Is there an accessible path from the point at which blind persons or persons with disabilities leave their car to the entrance of the building? Would you show it to me? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes  Shown (IF NECESSARY, REVISE ANSWERS TO ITEMS 10 AND 11.)

2.  No

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**42.** (IF YOU CANNOT LOCATE AN ENTRANCE THAT IS WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE ASK:) Is there an entrance to this building that is wheelchair accessible? Would you show it to me? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes     Shown (IF NECESSARY, REVISE ANSWERS TO ITEM 12.)

2.  No

**43.** (IF YOU CANNOT LOCATE AN ACCESSIBLE PATH FROM THE ENTRANCE TO THE VOTING ROOM ASK:) Is there a path from the entrance of the building to the voting room that is accessible to blind persons and persons with disabilities? Would you show it to me? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes     Shown (IF NECESSARY, REVISE ANSWERS TO ITEMS 14 AND 15.)

2.  No

**44.** Can the voting equipment in the voting stations be lowered? Would you show me how this is done? (CHECK ONE.)

1.  Yes     Shown (IF NECESSARY, REVISE ANSWERS TO ITEMS 25 OR 26.)

2.  No

**45.** I would like to just take a few minutes to review the answers you have given to the interview questions. (QUICKLY READ BACK THE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS TO THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO CHECK FOR CORRECTNESS AND REVISE ACCORDINGLY.)

1.  Answers to interview questions reviewed and revised, if necessary.

**46. Additional Notes and Comments**

# People and Counties Contacted During Our Review

**Table 7: Representatives of Election Offices in 50 States and the District of Columbia**

| State                | Office                                | Name and title  |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Alabama              | Office of Secretary of State          | Vicki Balogh<br>Director of Elections   |
| Arizona              | Office of Secretary of State          | Jessica Funkhouser<br>Election Director   |
| Alaska               | Division of Elections                 | Janet Kowalski<br>Director  |
| Arkansas             | State Board of Election Commissioners | Suzy Stormes<br>Director  |
| California           | Office of Secretary of State          | John Mott-Smith,<br>Chief of Elections Division   |
| Colorado             | Office of Secretary of State          | Bill Compton<br>Director of Elections   |
| Connecticut          | Office of Secretary of State          | Thomas Ferguson<br>Director of Elections  |
| Delaware             | Department of Elections               | Tom Cook<br>Commissioner of Elections   |
| District of Columbia | Board of Elections and Ethics         | Alice P. Miller<br>Executive Director<br><br>Marvin A. Ford<br>Chief of Staff<br><br>Tony Bass<br>Election Operations Manager |
| Florida              | Division of Elections                 | L. Clayton Roberts<br>Director  |
| Georgia              | Elections Division                    | Linda Beazley<br>Director   |
| Hawaii               | Office of Elections                   | Dwayne Yoshina<br>Chief Elections Officer   |
| Idaho                | Elections Division                    | Ben Ysursa<br>Chief Deputy Secretary of State   |
| Illinois             | State Board of Elections              | Ron Michaelson<br>Executive Director  |
| Indiana              | Election Commission                   | Spencer Valentine<br>Co-Director  |
| Iowa                 | Office of the Secretary of State      | Bob Galbraith<br>Deputy Secretary of State for Elections<br><br>Sandy Steinbach<br>Director of Elections                      |
| Kansas               | Office of the Secretary of State      | Brad Bryant<br>Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Elections  |

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| <b>State</b>   | <b>Office</b>                                   | <b>Name and title</b>   |
|----------------|---|---|
| Kentucky       | State Board of Elections                        | Mary Sue Helm<br>Executive Director   |
| Louisiana      | Office of the Secretary of State                | Frances Hurst<br>Elections/Commissions/Publications Administrator<br><br>Warren Ponder<br>Executive Counsel<br><br>Pat Stewart<br>Assistant Administrator |
| Maine          | Bureau of Corporations, Elections & Commissions | Julie Flynn<br>Director<br><br>Melissa Packard<br>Elections Assistant   |
| Maryland       | State Administrative Board of Election Laws     | Linda Lamone<br>Administrator   |
| Massachusetts  | Election Division                               | Michelle Tassinari<br>Director of Elections   |
| Michigan       | Bureau of Elections                             | Bradley S. Wittman<br>Director of Information and Voter Registration  |
| Minnesota      | Election Division                               | J. Bradley King<br>Director   |
| Mississippi    | Secretary of State for Elections                | Leslie Scott<br>Assistant   |
| Missouri       | Election Division                               | Daniel Hayes<br>Senior Election Specialist  |
| Montana        | Office of Secretary of State                    | Joe Kerwin<br>Deputy for Elections  |
| Nebraska       | Office of Secretary of State                    | Neal Erickson<br>Assistant Secretary of State   |
| Nevada         | Office of Secretary of State                    | Susan Morandi<br>Deputy Secretary of State for Elections  |
| New Hampshire  | State Election Office                           | Ellen Dube<br>Elections Assistant   |
| New Jersey     | State Election Office                           | Sharon Young<br>Director of Elections Division  |
| New Mexico     | State Bureau of Elections                       | Denise Lamb<br>Director of Elections  |
| New York       | State Board of Elections                        | Thomas R. Wilkey<br>Executive Director  |
| North Carolina | State Board of Elections                        | Gary Bartlett<br>Executive Director   |
| North Dakota   | Office of Secretary of State                    | Lee Ann Oliver<br>Elections Specialist  |

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| <b>State</b>   | <b>Office</b>                                     | <b>Name and title</b>   |
|----------------|---|---|
| Ohio           | Office of Secretary of State                      | Dana Walch<br>Director of Elections                               |
| Oklahoma       | State Elections Board                             | Lance Ward<br>Secretary   |
| Oregon         | Office of the Secretary of State                  | Scott Tighe<br>Operations Manager                                 |
| Pennsylvania   | Bureau of Commissions, Elections, and Legislation | Dick Filling<br>Commissioner of Elections                         |
| Rhode Island   | State Board of Elections                          | Robert Fontaine<br>Executive Director                             |
| South Carolina | State Elections Commission                        | Jim F. Hendrix<br>Executive Director                              |
| South Dakota   | State Election Office                             | Chris Nelson<br>Election Supervisor                               |
| Tennessee      | Office of Secretary of State                      | Brook Thompson<br>State Coordinator of Elections                  |
| Texas          | Office of Secretary of State                      | Ann McGeehan<br>Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Elections |
| Utah           | Office of the Lieutenant Governor                 | Amy Naccarato<br>Director of Elections                            |
| Vermont        | Office of Secretary of State                      | Kathy DeWolfe<br>Director of Elections & Campaign Finance         |
| Virginia       | State Board of Elections                          | Cameron Quinn<br>Secretary  |
| Washington     | Office of Secretary of State                      | Charlotte Ottavelli<br>Elections Assistant                        |
| West Virginia  | Office of Secretary of State                      | Jan Casto<br>Deputy Secretary of State and Director of Elections  |
| Wisconsin      | State Elections Board                             | Kevin Kennedy<br>Executive Director                               |
| Wyoming        | Office of Secretary of State                      | Peggy Nighswonger<br>Elections Officer                            |

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**Table 8: Alphabetical Listing of 100 Randomly Selected Counties**

| <b>#</b> | <b>County</b>          | <b>State</b> |
|----------|------------------------|--------------|
| 1        | Coffee                 | Alabama      |
| 2        | Mobile <sup>a</sup>    | Alabama      |
| 3        | Alameda                | California   |
| 4        | Imperial               | California   |
| 5        | Los Angeles            | California   |
| 6        | Monterey               | California   |
| 7        | Placer                 | California   |
| 8        | San Bernardino         | California   |
| 9        | San Diego              | California   |
| 10       | San Mateo              | California   |
| 11       | Santa Clara            | California   |
| 12       | Tulare                 | California   |
| 13       | Fairfield <sup>p</sup> | Connecticut  |
| 14       | Brevard                | Florida      |
| 15       | Dade                   | Florida      |
| 16       | Duval                  | Florida      |
| 17       | Lee                    | Florida      |
| 18       | Manatee                | Florida      |
| 19       | Monroe                 | Florida      |
| 20       | Pasco                  | Florida      |
| 21       | Pinellas               | Florida      |
| 22       | De Kalb                | Georgia      |
| 23       | Forsyth                | Georgia      |
| 24       | Gwinnett               | Georgia      |
| 25       | Richmond               | Georgia      |
| 26       | Cook                   | Illinois     |
| 27       | Stephenson             | Illinois     |
| 28       | Marion                 | Indiana      |
| 29       | Plymouth               | Iowa         |
| 30       | Worth                  | Iowa         |
| 31       | Johnson                | Kansas       |
| 32       | Sedgwick               | Kansas       |
| 33       | Wilson                 | Kansas       |
| 34       | Bracken                | Kentucky     |
| 35       | Jefferson              | Kentucky     |

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| <b>#</b> | <b>County</b>           | <b>State</b>   |
|----------|-------------------------|----------------|
| 36       | Kenton                  | Kentucky       |
| 37       | Hampshire <sup>b</sup>  | Massachusetts  |
| 38       | Norfolk <sup>b</sup>    | Massachusetts  |
| 39       | Suffolk                 | Massachusetts  |
| 40       | Berrien                 | Michigan       |
| 41       | Carlton                 | Minnesota      |
| 42       | Morrison                | Minnesota      |
| 43       | Ramsey                  | Minnesota      |
| 44       | Jackson                 | Mississippi    |
| 45       | New Madrid <sup>a</sup> | Missouri       |
| 46       | St. Louis City          | Missouri       |
| 47       | St. Louis <sup>a</sup>  | Missouri       |
| 48       | Clay                    | Nebraska       |
| 49       | Washoe                  | Nevada         |
| 50       | Bergen                  | New Jersey     |
| 51       | Essex                   | New Jersey     |
| 52       | Morris                  | New Jersey     |
| 53       | Union                   | New Jersey     |
| 54       | Mora <sup>a</sup>       | New Mexico     |
| 55       | San Juan <sup>a</sup>   | New Mexico     |
| 56       | Kings                   | New York       |
| 57       | Monroe                  | New York       |
| 58       | New York                | New York       |
| 59       | Niagara                 | New York       |
| 60       | Rockland                | New York       |
| 61       | Saratoga                | New York       |
| 62       | Schenectady             | New York       |
| 63       | Suffolk                 | New York       |
| 64       | Guilford                | North Carolina |
| 65       | Henderson               | North Carolina |
| 66       | Mecklenburg             | North Carolina |
| 67       | Auglaize <sup>a</sup>   | Ohio           |
| 68       | Franklin <sup>a</sup>   | Ohio           |
| 69       | Stark <sup>a</sup>      | Ohio           |
| 70       | Trumbull <sup>a</sup>   | Ohio           |
| 71       | Oklahoma                | Oklahoma       |
| 72       | Pontotoc                | Oklahoma       |



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| <b>#</b> | <b>County</b>           | <b>State</b>   |
|----------|-------------------------|----------------|
| 73       | Allegheny               | Pennsylvania   |
| 74       | Bradford                | Pennsylvania   |
| 75       | Bucks                   | Pennsylvania   |
| 76       | Dauphin                 | Pennsylvania   |
| 77       | Mercer                  | Pennsylvania   |
| 78       | Monroe <sup>a</sup>     | Pennsylvania   |
| 79       | Philadelphia            | Pennsylvania   |
| 80       | Union                   | Pennsylvania   |
| 81       | Orangeburg              | South Carolina |
| 82       | Putnam                  | Tennessee      |
| 83       | Shelby                  | Tennessee      |
| 84       | Bexar <sup>a</sup>      | Texas          |
| 85       | Brazoria <sup>a</sup>   | Texas          |
| 86       | Dallas <sup>a</sup>     | Texas          |
| 87       | Tarrant <sup>a</sup>    | Texas          |
| 88       | Williamson <sup>a</sup> | Texas          |
| 89       | Davis                   | Utah           |
| 90       | Chittenden <sup>b</sup> | Vermont        |
| 91       | Arlington               | Virginia       |
| 92       | Wythe                   | Virginia       |
| 93       | Benton                  | Washington     |
| 94       | Grant                   | Washington     |
| 95       | King                    | Washington     |
| 96       | Snohomish               | Washington     |
| 97       | Boone                   | West Virginia  |
| 98       | Marathon                | Wisconsin      |
| 99       | Oconto                  | Wisconsin      |
| 100      | Trempealeau             | Wisconsin      |

<sup>a</sup>For these 15 counties, we visited polling places either before or after Election Day.

<sup>b</sup>For these four counties, we spoke with election officials at the subcounty level (such as towns and cities) where responsibility for elections lies.

**Election and Other Officials  
and Representatives of  
Disability Organizations  
Whom We Contacted**

Gary Bartlett  
Executive Secretary-Director, State Board of Elections, North Carolina;  
Cochair, Election Center's National Task Force on Voting Accessibility; and  
member of National Association of State Election Directors (NASSED)

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David Baquis  
Accessibility Specialist, Office of Technical & Information Services, U.S.  
Access Board

Penelope Bonsall  
Director, Office of Election Administration, FEC

John Y. Brown, III  
Secretary of State, Kentucky; and Southern Regional Vice President of the  
National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS)

Pauline Brunelli  
Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program, U.S. Department of Defense  
(DOD)

Brad Bryant  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Elections/Legislative matters,  
Kansas; and Midwest Regional representative, NASED

Bryan Casky  
Assistant State Election Director, Kansas

David Capozzi  
Director, Office of Technical & Information Services, U.S. Access Board;  
and member of the Election Center's National Task Force on Voting  
Accessibility

Alfie Charles  
Chair, California Internet Task Force

Kristen Cox  
Assistant Director, Government Affairs, National Federation of the Blind

Jim Dickson  
Vice President, American Association of People with Disabilities and  
Consultant for the National Organization on Disability

Jessica Funkhouser  
Election Director, Arizona Secretary of State's office; and member of  
NASED

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James Gashel  
Director of Government Affairs, National Federation of the Blind

Tom Goodman  
Director of Public Affairs, National Association of Counties (NACO)

Brian Hancock  
Election Research Specialist, Office of Election Administration, FEC

Ernest Hawkins  
Registrar of Voters, Sacramento County; former President, National Association of County Recorders and Clerks (NACRC); Cochair of NACO National Commission on Election Standards and Reform; and member of the FEC Election Administration Advisory Panel—2001

J. Patrick Kelly  
County Clerk and Recorder, El Paso County; Cochair of NACRC Election Interest Group; and member, NACO National Commission on Election Standards and Reform

Robert Kengle  
Deputy Chief, Voting Section, Civil Rights Division, DOJ

William C. Kimberling  
Deputy Director, Office of Election Administration, FEC

Andrew Lelling  
Counsel to Assistant Attorney General, Senior Counsel Voting Reform, DOJ

R. Doug Lewis  
Executive Director, Election Center; and member of the Election Center's National Task Force on Voting Accessibility and NACO National Commission on Election Standards and Reform

Marsha Mazz  
Technical Assistance Coordinator and Accessibility Specialist, Office of Technical and Information Services, U.S. Access Board

Ann McGeehan  
Texas State Elections Director; NASED President; and member of the Election Center's National Task Force on Voting Accessibility

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Gary McIntosh  
Former Director of Elections, Washington and former NASED President

Michelle Mrozkowski  
Director, Information and Education, North Carolina State Board of  
Elections

Amy Naccarato  
Director of Elections, Utah; and NASED West Regional Representative

Lee Page  
Associate Advocacy Director, Paralyzed Veterans of America; and Cochair,  
Election Center's National Task Force on Voting Accessibility

Carol Paquette  
Program Analyst, Federal Voting Assistance Program, DOD

Cathy Pearsall-Stipek  
Certified Public Official-Auditor, Pierce County, Washington; President,  
NACRC; member of NACO National Commission on Election Standards  
and Reform

Jim Pecht  
Accessibility Specialist, Office of Technical and Information Services, U.S.  
Access Board

Sharon Priest  
Secretary of State, Arkansas; and President, NASS

Leslie Reynolds  
Executive Director, NASS

Joseph D. Rich  
Acting Chief, Voting Section, Civil Rights Division, DOJ

Mark Richert  
Government Relations Representative, American Foundation for the Blind;  
and member of the Election Center's National Task Force on Voting  
Accessibility

David Scott  
Policy Analyst, The Council of State Governments; and NASED member

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Susie Stormes  
Director, Arkansas State Board of Election Commissioners; and NASED member

Christopher M. Thomas  
Director, Bureau of Elections, Michigan; and NASED member

Brook Thompson  
Coordinator of Elections, Tennessee; and NASED President-Elect

Scott Tighe  
Operations Manager, Secretary of State, Oregon; and member of the Election Center's National Task Force on Voting Accessibility

Rebecca Wertz  
Deputy Chief, Voting Section, Civil Rights Division, DOJ

Terrence Williams  
Information Systems and Services, Federal Voting Assistance Program, DOD

John L. Wodatch  
Chief, Disability Rights Section, Civil Rights Division, DOJ

# State Provisions Concerning Voting Accessibility

**Table 9: State Provisions Concerning Polling Place Accessibility, Accommodation of Voting Booth Areas and Equipment, and Aids for Visually Impaired Voters**

| State                | Polling place accessibility                                |   |   |   |
|----------------------|--|---|---|---|
|                      | All polling places must/ should be accessible <sup>a</sup> | State has polling place accessibility standards | Inspections of polling place accessibility required | Reporting on polling place accessibility required |
| Alabama              | Policy   | Policy  | *   | *   |
| Alaska               | Policy   | Policy  | Policy  | *   |
| Arizona              | Policy (n)   | Policy  | Policy  | *   |
| Arkansas             | Law (n)  | Policy  | Law   | Law   |
| California           | Law  | Policy  | Policy  | Policy  |
| Colorado             | *b   | Law   | *   | *   |
| Connecticut          | Law  | Law   | Law   | Policy  |
| Delaware             | Law  | *   | *   | *   |
| District of Columbia | Policy   | Policy  | *   | *   |
| Florida              | Law  | Law   | *   | *   |
| Georgia              | Law (n)  | Law   | Law   | Law   |
| Hawaii               | *  | Policy  | *   | *   |
| Idaho                | Law  | Law   | *   | *   |
| Illinois             | Law  | Law   | Law   | *   |
| Indiana              | Law  | Policy  | *   | Policy  |
| Iowa                 | Policy   | Policy  | Policy  | *   |
| Kansas               | Law  | Law   | Law   | *   |
| Kentucky             | Law (n)  | Policy  | Policy  | Policy  |
| Louisiana            | Law  | Law   | Law   | Law   |
| Maine                | Law (n)  | Law   | *   | *   |
| Maryland             | Law  | Law   | Law   | Policy  |
| Massachusetts        | Law <sup>c</sup>   | Law   | Law   | Policy  |
| Michigan             | Law (n)  | Policy  | Policy  | Policy  |
| Minnesota            | Law  | Law   | *   | *   |
| Mississippi          | *  | *   | *   | *   |
| Missouri             | *e   | *   | *   | *   |
| Montana              | Law  | Law   | Law   | Law   |
| Nebraska             | Law (n)  | Law   | *   | *   |
| Nevada               | Law (n)  | *   | Policy  | Policy  |
| New Hampshire        | Law (n)  | Law   | *   | *   |
| New Jersey           | Law  | Law   | Law   | Law   |

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| Voting booth areas and equipment                        |  | Aids for visually impaired voters                              |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| Voting areas must/<br>should accommodate<br>wheelchairs | Voting systems must/<br>should accommodate<br>individuals with<br>disabilities | Braille ballot or<br>methods of voting<br>must/may be provided | Ballots with larger type<br>must/may be provided | Magnifying instruments<br>must/may be provided |
| *   | *  | *  | *  | Policy   |
| Policy  | *  | *  | *  | Policy   |
| Policy  | Policy   | *  | *  | *  |
| Policy  | Law  | *  | Policy   | Policy   |
| Policy  | Policy   | *  | *  | Policy   |
| *   | *  | *  | *  | *  |
| Law   | Law  | *  | *  | Policy   |
| *   | *  | *  | *  | *  |
| Policy  | Policy   | *  | *  | Policy   |
| *   | *  | *  | *  | *  |
| Law (s)   | *  | *  | *  | *  |
| Policy  | Policy   | *  | *  | Policy   |
| Policy  | Policy   | *  | *  | *  |
| *   | Law  | *  | *  | Law (s)  |
| *   | *  | *  | *  | Policy   |
| Law   | *  | *  | *  | *  |
| *   | *  | *  | *  | *  |
| Policy  | Policy   | Policy   | Policy   | Policy   |
| Law   | Policy   | *  | *  | *  |
| *   | *  | *  | *  | Law  |
| Policy  | Law  | *  | *  | *  |
| Law   | Law  | *  | *  | *  |
| Policy  | Law  | *  | *  | Policy   |
| Law   | *d   | *  | *  | *  |
| *   | *  | *  | *  | *  |
| *   | *  | *  | *  | *  |
| Law   | *  | *  | *  | *  |
| Law   | *  | *  | *  | *  |
| Law   | Law  | *  | Law (s)  | *  |
| Law   | *  | *  | *  | *  |
| *   | *  | *  | *  | *  |

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| State               | Polling place accessibility                                |   |   |   |
|---------------------|--|---|---|---|
|                     | All polling places must/ should be accessible <sup>a</sup> | State has polling place accessibility standards | Inspections of polling place accessibility required | Reporting on polling place accessibility required |
| New Mexico          | Law <sup>f</sup> (n)                                       | Policy  | Law   | *   |
| New York            | Law  | Law   | *   | Law   |
| North Carolina      | Policy   | Policy  | Policy  | Policy  |
| North Dakota        | Law (n)  | Policy  | Policy  | *   |
| Ohio                | Law  | Law   | Law   | Policy  |
| Oklahoma            | Law (n)  | Policy  | Policy  | Law   |
| Oregon <sup>g</sup> | Law (s)  | Law   | Law   | Law   |
| Pennsylvania        | *  | *   | *   | *   |
| Rhode Island        | Law  | Law   | Policy  | *   |
| South Carolina      | Law <sup>i</sup> (s)                                       | *   | *   | *   |
| South Dakota        | *  | *   | *   | *   |
| Tennessee           | Law  | Policy  | *   | *   |
| Texas               | Law (n)  | Law   | Policy  | *   |
| Utah                | *  | *   | *   | *   |
| Vermont             | Law (s)  | Law   | Law   | Law   |
| Virginia            | Law  | Policy  | Policy  | *   |
| Washington          | Law  | Law   | Law   | Law   |
| West Virginia       | Policy   | Policy  | *   | *   |
| Wisconsin           | Law <sup>j</sup>   | Policy  | Policy  | *   |
| Wyoming             | *  | *   | *   | *   |



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| Voting booth areas and equipment                 |  | Aids for visually impaired voters                        |   |   |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| Voting areas must/should accommodate wheelchairs | Voting systems must/should accommodate individuals with disabilities | Braille ballot or methods of voting must/may be provided | Ballots with larger type must/may be provided | Magnifying instruments must/may be provided |
| Law  | Law  | *  | *   | Law (s)                                     |
| Law  | Law  | *  | *   | *   |
| Policy   | Policy   | Policy   | *   | Policy                                      |
| Policy   | Policy   | *  | *   | Policy                                      |
| *  | Law (s)  | *  | *   | *   |
| Policy   | Policy   | *  | *   | Law   |
| Law  | *  | *h   | *   | Law (s)                                     |
| *  | *  | *  | *   | *   |
| *  | Law  | Law  | *   | *   |
| *  | *  | *  | *   | Policy                                      |
| *  | *  | *  | *   | *   |
| *  | *  | *  | *   | *   |
| Law  | Law  | Law (s)  | Law (s)                                       | *   |
| Law  | *  | *  | *   | *   |
| Law (s)  | Law  | Law (s)  | *   | Law (s)                                     |
| Policy   | Policy   | Policy   | *   | Policy                                      |
| Law  | *  | *  | *   | Law (s)                                     |
| Policy   | *  | *  | *   | *   |
| Policy   | *  | *  | *   | Policy                                      |
| *  | *  | *  | *   | *   |

Notes: This analysis does not include provisions related to emergencies. Law = required by law. Policy = required or recommended in written state policy or other guidelines. \* = no provision in law or policy. (s) = suggested, recommended, or otherwise allowed by law, but not required. (n) = no exceptions.

<sup>a</sup>All polling places must/should be accessible: State provisions may allow exceptions if no accessible polling places are available.

<sup>b</sup>Colorado: At least one polling place within each political subdivision must be accessible.

<sup>c</sup>Massachusetts: A state election official indicated that it is the policy of the Secretary of State not to grant exceptions to accessibility requirements and, to date, no exemptions have been granted.

<sup>d</sup>Minnesota: Recent legislation authorizes the licensing of touch-sensitive electronic voting systems for experimental use at an election before approval for general use, including at least one voting system permitting blind or visually impaired individuals to vote independently and privately. The extent of experimental use will be determined by the Secretary of State.

<sup>e</sup>Missouri: Each local election authority may designate one common site as an Election Day polling place for accessibility to the handicapped and elderly.

<sup>f</sup>New Mexico: One polling place in each precinct must be accessible.

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<sup>g</sup>Oregon: This is a unique state in that all elections held on the date of the biennial primaries and general elections are generally conducted by mail balloting. While vote-by-mail is the normal practice for federal elections, some polling booths are required and the responses shown for Oregon generally reflect traditional voting at a polling place.

<sup>h</sup>Oregon: Public notice must be made of voting aids available.

<sup>i</sup>South Carolina: Each county election commission (1) is encouraged to make every polling place barrier free and (2) shall provide at least one polling place in the county free of architectural barriers for voters with disabilities.

<sup>j</sup>Wisconsin: A state election official informed us that they have never implemented the statutory authority to exempt polling places from accessibility requirements.

Source: GAO analysis of state statutes, regulations, and other written provisions that were identified and obtained by GAO, or were provided by state election officials as of July 2001. State policies or practices that are unwritten, or for which supporting documentation was not provided as of July 2001, were not included in this analysis. Election officials in each state reviewed our analysis and provided comments and corrections, which we incorporated where appropriate.

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**Table 10: State Provisions Concerning Alternative Voting Methods or Accommodations On or Before Election Day**

| State                | Notify voters of inaccessible polling places | Curbside voting available on Election Day | Alternative and accessible polling places available on Election Day | Ballot taken to voters' residences |                      |
|----------------------|--|---|---|------------------------------------|----------------------|
|                      |  |   |   | On Election Day                    | Before Election Day  |
| Alabama              | *  | *   | *   | *                                  | *                    |
| Alaska               | *  | Law                                       | Law   | Law                                | Law                  |
| Arizona              | Policy                                       | Policy                                    | Policy  | Law                                | Law                  |
| Arkansas             | *  | Law (p)                                   | *   | Law (p)                            | Law (p)              |
| California           | Law  | Law                                       | Law   | *                                  | *                    |
| Colorado             | Law  | Law                                       | Law   | *                                  | Law <sup>f</sup>     |
| Connecticut          | Policy                                       | *   | Policy  | Law (p)                            | Law <sup>g</sup> (p) |
| Delaware             | Law  | *   | Law   | *                                  | *                    |
| District of Columbia | *  | Policy                                    | Law   | *                                  | *                    |
| Florida              | *  | *   | *   | *                                  | Law <sup>h</sup>     |
| Georgia              | *  | *   | *   | *                                  | *                    |
| Hawaii               | *  | Law                                       | *   | *                                  | *                    |
| Idaho                | *  | Law                                       | Policy  | *                                  | *                    |
| Illinois             | Law  | Law                                       | Law   | *                                  | *                    |
| Indiana              | *  | *   | Law   | *                                  | Law                  |
| Iowa                 | Policy                                       | Law                                       | *   | Law <sup>j</sup>                   | Law <sup>j</sup>     |
| Kansas               | *  | Law                                       | *   | *                                  | *                    |
| Kentucky             | *  | Law (p)                                   | *   | Law (p)                            | Law (p)              |
| Louisiana            | Law <sup>k</sup>                             | Policy (p)                                | Law   | *                                  | Law <sup>l</sup>     |
| Maine                | *  | Law                                       | *   | *                                  | Law <sup>m</sup>     |
| Maryland             | Policy                                       | *   | Law   | *                                  | *                    |
| Massachusetts        | *  | Law (p)                                   | *   | *                                  | Law <sup>n</sup>     |
| Michigan             | Policy                                       | *   | Policy  | Law                                | Law                  |
| Minnesota            | *  | Law                                       | *   | *                                  | Law <sup>o</sup>     |
| Mississippi          | *  | Policy                                    | *   | Law (p)                            | Law (p)              |
| Missouri             | *  | Law                                       | Law   | *                                  | Law                  |
| Montana              | Law  | Law                                       | Law   | *                                  | *                    |
| Nebraska             | *  | Law                                       | *   | *                                  | *                    |
| Nevada               | *  | Law                                       | *   | Law <sup>p</sup>                   | *                    |

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| Absentee voting <sup>a</sup>   |         |                            |                  |   |   |                               |
|--------------------------------|---------|----------------------------|------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|
| Ballot due before Election Day |         | Ballot due on Election Day |                  |   |   |                               |
| In person <sup>b</sup>         | By mail | In person <sup>b</sup>     | By mail          | Mailed ballot may be received after Election Day <sup>c</sup> | Permanent absentee ballot available to voters with disabilities | Other early voting provisions |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law <sup>d</sup> | *   | *   | *e                            |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | *(d)             | Law   | Law   | Law                           |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law              | *   | *   | Law (q)                       |
| Law                            | *       | *                          | Law (d)          | *   | *   | Law (q)                       |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law              | *   | Law (r)   | Law (q)                       |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law (d)          | *   | *   | Law (q)                       |
| Law                            | *       | *                          | Law (d)          | *   | *   | *                             |
| Law                            | Law     | *                          | *                | *   | *   | *                             |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | *                | Law   | *   | Law                           |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law (d)          | *   | *   | Law <sup>i</sup>              |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law (d)          | *   | *   | Law (q)                       |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law              | *   | *   | Law                           |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law              | *   | *   | Law (q)                       |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law (d)          | *   | *   | Law (q)                       |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law (d)          | *   | *   | Law                           |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | *                | Law   | *   | Law (q)                       |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law (d)          | *   | Law (r)   | Law                           |
| *                              | *       | *                          | Law              | *   | *   | *                             |
| Law                            | Law     | *                          | *                | *   | Law (r)   | Law (q)                       |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law (d)          | *   | *   | Law                           |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | *                | Law   | *   | *                             |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law (d)          | *   | Law (r)   | Law                           |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law (d)          | *   | *   | Law (q)                       |
| Law                            | *       | *                          | Law (d)          | *   | Law   | Law (q)                       |
| Law                            | Law     | *                          | *                | *   | Law (r)   | Law                           |
| Law                            | *       | *                          | Law              | *   | Law (r)   | Law                           |
| *                              | *       | Policy                     | Policy           | *   | *   | Law                           |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | *(d)             | Law   | *   | Law                           |
| *                              | *       | Law                        | Law (d)          | *   | *   | Law                           |

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| State               | Notify voters of inaccessible polling places | Curbside voting available on Election Day | Alternative and accessible polling places available on Election Day | Ballot taken to voters' residences |                     |
|---------------------|--|---|---|------------------------------------|---------------------|
|                     |  |   |   | On Election Day                    | Before Election Day |
| New Hampshire       | *  | *   | *   | *                                  | *                   |
| New Jersey          | Law  | *   | Law   | *                                  | *                   |
| New Mexico          | *  | *   | *   | *                                  | *                   |
| New York            | Law  | *   | Law   | *                                  | Law <sup>q</sup>    |
| North Carolina      | *  | Law                                       | Law   | *                                  | *                   |
| North Dakota        | *  | *   | *   | *                                  | *                   |
| Ohio                | *  | Law                                       | *   | Law                                | Law                 |
| Oklahoma            | *  | Law <sup>r</sup>                          | Law   | *                                  | Law <sup>s</sup>    |
| Oregon <sup>t</sup> | Law  | Law                                       | Law   | Law <sup>u</sup>                   | Law <sup>u</sup>    |
| Pennsylvania        | *  | *   | *   | *                                  | *                   |
| Rhode Island        | Law  | Law <sup>w</sup>                          | Law   | *                                  | Law <sup>x</sup>    |
| South Carolina      | Policy                                       | Law                                       | Law   | *                                  | *                   |
| South Dakota        | *  | *   | *   | *                                  | *                   |
| Tennessee           | Law  | *   | Law   | *                                  | *                   |
| Texas               | *  | Law                                       | * <sup>z</sup>  | Law (p)                            | Law (p)             |
| Utah                | *  | *   | *   | *                                  | *                   |
| Vermont             | *  | Law                                       | Law   | Law                                | Law                 |
| Virginia            | *  | Law                                       | *   | *                                  | *                   |
| Washington          | Law  | *   | Law   | *                                  | *                   |
| West Virginia       | *  | Law <sup>aa</sup>                         | Law   | Law <sup>bb</sup>                  | Law <sup>bb</sup>   |
| Wisconsin           | Policy                                       | Law                                       | Law   | *                                  | Law <sup>cc</sup>   |
| Wyoming             | *  | *   | *   | *                                  | *                   |

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| Absentee voting <sup>a</sup>   |                  |                            |         |   |   |                               |
|--------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|---------|---|---|-------------------------------|
| Ballot due before Election Day |                  | Ballot due on Election Day |         |   |   |                               |
| In person <sup>b</sup>         | By mail          | In person <sup>b</sup>     | By mail | Mailed ballot may be received after Election Day <sup>c</sup> | Permanent absentee ballot available to voters with disabilities | Other early voting provisions |
| Policy                         | *                | *                          | Law     | *   | *   | *                             |
| *                              | *                | Law                        | Law (d) | *   | Law   | *                             |
| Law                            | *                | *                          | Law     | *   | *   | Law                           |
| *                              | *                | Law                        | *       | Law   | Law (r)   | *                             |
| Law                            | Law(d)           | *                          | *       | *   | *   | Law                           |
| Law                            | *                | *                          | *       | Law   | *   | Law                           |
| *                              | *                | Law                        | Law (d) | *   | *   | Law (q)                       |
| Law                            | *                | *                          | Law     | *   | *   | Law (q)                       |
| *                              | *                | Law                        | Law     | *   | Law   | Law                           |
| Law <sup>y</sup>               | Law <sup>y</sup> | *                          | *       | *   | *   | *                             |
| *                              | *                | *                          | Law     | *   | Law <sup>y</sup> (r)  | *                             |
| *                              | *                | Law                        | Law     | *   | *   | Policy                        |
| *                              | *                | Law                        | Law (d) | *   | *   | Law                           |
| Law                            | *                | *                          | Law     | *   | Law   | Law (q)                       |
| Law                            | *                | *                          | Law     | *   | *   | Law (q)                       |
| *                              | *                | Law                        | *       | Law   | Law   | Law                           |
| *                              | *                | Law                        | Law     | *   | *   | Law                           |
| *                              | *                | Policy                     | Policy  | *   | *   | Law                           |
| *                              | *                | Law                        | *       | Law   | Law   | *                             |
| Law                            | *                | *                          | *       | Law   | Law (r)   | Law (q)                       |
| *                              | *                | Law                        | Law     | *   | Law (r)   | Law                           |
| *                              | *                | Law                        | Law     | *   | *   | *                             |

Notes: This analysis does not include provisions relating to emergencies. Law = provided by law. Policy = provided by policy documents. \* = no provision. (p) = prohibited by law. (r) = law includes restrictions. (q) = law or policy requires accessibility. (d) = law also permits ballot to be delivered by a personal representative. Thirteen states—Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and Texas—require all polling places to be accessible.

<sup>a</sup>Absentee voting: Provisions for overseas or military voters are not included in this analysis.

<sup>b</sup>In-person absentee voting: May include provisions for either voting in person or personal delivery of ballot or both; we use the latest date if they are different.

<sup>c</sup>Mailed ballots may be received after Election Day: Most of these states require ballots to be postmarked on or before Election Day.

<sup>d</sup>Alabama: Must be postmarked by the day prior to Election Day and received by Election Day.

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<sup>e</sup>Alabama: State statute permits early voting on Saturday 10 days prior to Election Day only for voters who will be absent on Election Day, and does not address early voting by voters with disabilities who will be present in the county on Election Day.

<sup>f</sup>Colorado: When more than five absentee ballots are to be sent to the same group residential facility—nursing home, senior citizen housing facility, etc.—the statute authorizes county clerk employees to deliver and return the absentee ballots. However, the statute is silent as to when the visits to the nursing homes can occur.

<sup>g</sup>Connecticut: Ballots cannot be hand-delivered to the voter's home. However, if 20 or more patients in a nursing home, residential care home, or VA health-care facility wish to vote, registrars of voters may supervise absentee voting and early voting at the homes. Absentee balloting at the homes must be no later than the last business day before the election.

<sup>h</sup>Florida: The statute permits "supervised" voting at a certain time and date in assisted living facilities and nursing homes. The statute is silent as to when the voting must occur.

<sup>i</sup>Florida: Effective January 1, 2002, any qualified and registered voter may pick up and vote an absentee ballot in person before Election Day at the supervisor of elections' office.

<sup>j</sup>Iowa: The county auditor must send a bipartisan team to deliver an absentee ballot to any resident or patient of a hospital or nursing home who requests a ballot.

<sup>k</sup>Louisiana: Notification requirement applies only to absentee voting in person at registrar's office.

<sup>l</sup>Louisiana: On a fixed day, election officials will go to nursing homes so voters can cast their votes.

<sup>m</sup>Maine: A state election official interprets the statute, permitting absentee voting in the presence of the clerk, to permit the clerk to take the absentee ballot to a voter's home. Another statute establishes early voting at nursing homes.

<sup>n</sup>Massachusetts: Local election officials may conduct supervised absentee voting at a designated health care facility before Election Day.

<sup>o</sup>Minnesota: Permits voting by people with disabilities at nursing homes or health-care residences (early absentee voting in front of two election judges who come to the facility).

<sup>p</sup>Nevada: County clerk shall establish at least one polling place for a precinct in any residential development exclusively for elderly persons if more than 100 of the residents of the development are registered to vote, and adequate area is available and the development owner consents to the establishment of the polling place.

<sup>q</sup>New York: Permits people with disabilities to vote in their nursing home if there are at least five residents with disabilities on site.

<sup>r</sup>Oklahoma: Curbside voting is not available to voters whose sole impairment is blindness or other type of visual impairment.

<sup>s</sup>Oklahoma: Voters confined to nursing homes can vote there by written ballot, which is delivered and collected by the state.

<sup>t</sup>Oregon: This is a unique state in that all elections held on the date of the biennial primaries and general elections are generally conducted by mail balloting. While vote-by-mail is the normal practice for federal elections, some polling booths are required and the responses shown for Oregon generally reflect traditional voting at a polling place.

<sup>u</sup>Oregon: Any voter with disabilities, upon request, shall receive assistance of two persons of different parties provided by the clerk. Also, a voter with a physical disability may request assistance; the location is negotiable, including home, the elections office, drop site locations, or community service center, depending on the voter's need.

<sup>v</sup>Pennsylvania: A ballot received after 5 p.m. on the Friday before the election but before the closing of the polls on Election Day is valid only for presidential and vice-presidential votes.

<sup>w</sup>Rhode Island: Curbside voting is permitted if there is no alternative accessible location within the city or town.

<sup>x</sup>Rhode Island: The statute permits election officials to come to a nursing home or hospital to deliver ballots and supervise the casting of votes and assist where necessary. Ballots are then mailed.



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<sup>y</sup>Rhode Island: Individuals permanently incapacitated may be put on a list to automatically receive absentee ballot applications for 5 years.

<sup>z</sup>Texas: State law requires that all polling places be accessible without exception.

<sup>aa</sup>West Virginia: A state official informed us that curbside voting is available only if a polling place is not accessible.

<sup>bb</sup>West Virginia: Nursing home residents may qualify for emergency absentee voting. Election officials may deliver an application and ballot to nursing home resident voters no earlier than the 7<sup>th</sup> day preceding the election and no later than noon on Election Day, await their completion, and return the completed application and ballot to the circuit clerk prior to the close of polls on Election Day.

<sup>cc</sup>Wisconsin: Residents of nursing homes, retirement homes, and certain community-based facilities may vote absentee. Two special voting deputies will visit the home or qualified community-based residential facility at a prearranged day and time (but no later than 5 p.m. on the Monday preceding the election) for the purpose of supervising absentee voting.

Source: GAO analysis of state statutes, regulations, and other written provisions that were identified and obtained by GAO or were provided by state election officials as of July 2001. State policies or practices that are unwritten, or for which supporting documentation was not provided as of July 2001, were not included in this analysis. Election officials in each state reviewed our analysis and provided comments and corrections, which we incorporated where appropriate.

# Selected Potential Impediments by Location Area

| Location area and potential impediment  | Percentage of all polling places with impediments in the specified location area |
|---|--|
| Parking area  | 33%  |
| No parking designated for people with disabilities  | 32%  |
| No parking for any voters   | 1%   |
| Route from parking area to building entrance  | 57%  |
| Unpaved or poor surface   | 23%  |
| Ramps with slopes greater than 1:12   | 21%  |
| Sidewalk slope steeper than 1:12  | 20%  |
| Unramped or uncut curb(s)   | 8%   |
| No sidewalk or pathway for part of the way  | 8%   |
| Ramps that measure more than 6 inches from the ground to their highest point and lack two handrails | 6%   |
| Steps have no handrails   | 5%   |
| Entrance to the building  | 59%  |
| Door thresholds greater than ½-inch in height   | 37%  |
| Closed doors that would be difficult for a person in a wheelchair to open                           | 26%  |
| Single-door openings less than 32 inches wide   | 10%  |
| Double-door openings less than 32 inches wide   | 5%   |
| Route from inside of the building to the voting room  | 14%  |
| Single-door openings less than 32 inches wide   | 5%   |
| Closed doors that would be difficult for a person in a wheelchair to open                           | 3%   |

Notes: Potential impediments listed are those that occurred with the greatest frequency. Sampling errors of the listed potential impediments range from 2 to 8 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

Source: GAO analysis of polling place data collected on Nov. 7, 2000.

# Issues and Challenges Related to Voting Accommodations and Alternatives

| Accommodations and alternatives   | Advantages and disadvantages for voters  | Challenges for election officials  |
|---|--|--|
| Curbside voting: Allow voters who cannot enter the polling place to vote at the curbside of their neighborhood polling place    | <p>Advantage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters with disabilities may be able to vote outside their neighborhood polling places on Election Day</li> </ul> <p>Disadvantages—some voters with disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may see this accommodation as unequal treatment and may prefer to vote as others in the polling room</li> <li>• may not want to draw special attention and feel that this represents a loss of dignity or independence</li> <li>• may not be able to cast a secret ballot</li> <li>• may have difficulty voting if a poll worker is unavailable to provide assistance or weather is inclement</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide and train staff at each polling place to ensure that voters who cannot enter the building are able to vote</li> <li>• May require changing laws that prohibit using this accommodation</li> </ul>   |
| Reassignment: Allow voters to use another polling place on Election Day when their neighborhood polling place is not accessible | <p>Advantage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters with disabilities have an accessible polling place for voting on Election Day</li> </ul> <p>Disadvantages—voters with disabilities may need to make an extra effort to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become aware of accessibility problems and arrange reassignment with the election office</li> <li>• Travel farther to vote than other voters in their precinct</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify polling places that may prevent access for some voters and communicate this issue to them so that they can arrange reassignment</li> <li>• Identify an accessible polling place</li> <li>• Provide appropriate ballots at reassigned polling place</li> <li>• Train poll workers to handle a reassigned voter</li> </ul> |
| Superprecincts: Locate the polling place for more than one precinct within the same building on Election Day                    | <p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters with disabilities have an accessible polling place for voting on Election Day</li> <li>• Voters with disabilities are not required to travel farther than others</li> </ul> <p>Disadvantage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some voters may be required to travel outside of their neighborhood to vote</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find an accessible facility that has sufficient space for voting and parking and will not require excessive travel for most voters</li> </ul>   |

**Appendix VI  
Issues and Challenges Related to Voting  
Accommodations and Alternatives**

*(Continued From Previous Page)*

| <b>Accommodations and alternatives</b>  | <b>Advantages and disadvantages for voters</b>   | <b>Challenges for election officials</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| Early voting: Allow voters to use one or more central sites sometimes for a week or more, just before Election Day  | <p><b>Advantages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters are provided with a more flexible time period for voting</li> <li>• Some voters with disabilities may find that these sites offer better access and voting equipment that allow them to vote independently</li> </ul> <p><b>Disadvantages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters with disabilities may prefer that the traditional polling places used on Election Day be fully accessible</li> <li>• Voters would not have access to late-breaking information on candidates and ballot measures prior to casting their ballot</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish sites and provide staff and resources, such as voting equipment and different ballot types</li> <li>• Mitigate any increased opportunity for fraudulent voting</li> </ul>   |
| Less-restrictive absentee voting: Allow less-restrictive use of absentee ballots, such as not requiring a reason to use temporary absentee ballots or allowing permanent absentee ballots | <p><b>Advantages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters have the convenience of being able to vote from home and greater flexibility in choosing when to vote</li> </ul> <p><b>Disadvantages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters, especially those needing assistance, may have a greater potential for experiencing inappropriate influence from other household members when voting</li> <li>• Some voters with disabilities may find that requirements in some states for using permanent absentee voting (for example, providing doctor's certification) discourage use of this option</li> <li>• Some voters with disabilities may prefer that the traditional polling places used on Election Day be fully accessible</li> <li>• Voters would not have access to late-breaking information on candidates and ballot measures</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide additional staff and other resources necessary to accommodate the expansion of absentee voting, such as for mailing, receiving, and counting additional absentee votes</li> <li>• Develop procedures to maintain an accurate list of absentee voters</li> <li>• Balance providing voter convenience with fraud control</li> </ul>   |
| Universal vote-by-mail: Mail ballots to voters who can return them by mail or deposit them at designated locations, with exceptions for those who are unable to vote without assistance   | <p><b>Advantages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters are allowed to vote from their own home and within an expanded time frame</li> <li>• Voters are provided with uniform statewide voting access that provides equal treatment for all</li> </ul> <p><b>Disadvantages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters who prefer using a polling place may resist this method</li> <li>• Voters may have increased potential for inappropriate influence from other household members</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assure uniformity of statewide system, if implemented at the state level</li> <li>• Demonstrate reliability and security</li> <li>• Provide staff and other resources necessary for maintaining an accurate list of voters and addresses as well as mailing, receiving, verifying, and counting votes</li> <li>• Rely upon postal service to provide timely delivery of ballots</li> <li>• Provide another option for those who cannot use this method without assistance, such as sending staff to the residence of a voter with a disability</li> </ul> |

**Appendix VI  
Issues and Challenges Related to Voting  
Accommodations and Alternatives**

*(Continued From Previous Page)*

| <b>Accommodations and alternatives</b>  | <b>Advantages and disadvantages for voters</b>   | <b>Challenges for election officials</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Internet voting: Allow voters to cast a ballot using the Internet; implementation may be in several phases, starting at polling places and potentially expanding to kiosks and other remote locations, such a voter's home or office</p> | <p><b>Advantages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters are provided greater flexibility to vote when they want and from convenient locations, if remote Internet voting is allowed</li> <li>• Blind individuals may be able to vote independently with special equipment and a web site that has been designed to provide universal access, per federal standards</li> </ul> <p><b>Disadvantages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters who are accustomed to traditional methods may resist this method</li> <li>• Voters who lack a convenient connection to the Internet may not have equal access to voting</li> <li>• Blind voters may need special equipment to allow them to use the Internet</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take steps (for example, pilot testing and certification) to ensure that the system is secure, reliable, cost effective, and accessible to disabled voters and that it allows voters to cast a secret ballot</li> <li>• Develop operational procedures and train workers to ensure sufficient technical support to maintain equipment and assist voters</li> <li>• Educate public on security features and use of system</li> <li>• Wait for technological improvements to ensure voter identity, secrecy, and integrity of the votes, if remote access is allowed</li> <li>• Protect equipment from vandalism or tampering, if public kiosks are used</li> <li>• Ensure widespread availability of Internet access, if remote access is allowed</li> </ul> |

Source: GAO analysis of comments by officials of organizations that represent the interests of election officials and people with disabilities.

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# GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgements

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## GAO Contacts

Barbara D. Bovbjerg, (202) 512-7215  
Carol Dawn Petersen, (202) 512-7215

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## Staff Acknowledgements

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