

Election Participation and the Texas Disability Vote

A JOINT STATEMENT FROM A COALITION OF DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS

With the Texas 87th Legislative session at an end and voting legislation still looming, we would like you to understand the unintended and negative effects that recently proposed voting laws will have on the disability community's ability to participate in the electoral process.

The Texas disability community supports voter participation and is confident that it can be accomplished in a way that does not impede nor eliminate existing voting rights and legal accommodations. As a historically disenfranchised group, the Texas disability community must have a seat at the table to provide meaningful input about any voting bills that may be introduced in a special session or in the future.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, people with disabilities are approximately 1 out of 6 voting age adults. More Texans with disabilities have registered, educated themselves and voted than ever before. Improved accessibility laws and policies have contributed to our amplified involvement.

Unfortunately, the proposed voting legislation during the regular session not only changed the definition of disability, it also added new requirements to mail in ballots, made personal assistants liable for criminal offenses, and introduced new curbside voting procedures that would have made it extremely difficult for people with disabilities to vote.

The disability community has been fighting for our basic civil rights alongside so many people of color, those that are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and those of various gender identities. We are a population who find ourselves privileged to exist at an intersection of all these communities. Disability reaches into all social groups and this allows us, as disability advocates, a unique capacity to speak on behalf of many of the individuals who will be affected by *any* version of this voter legislation.

Like every other Texan, we want to exercise our right to vote and we should be able to do so with the same ease as Texans who do not have disabilities.

Why should the disability community have to provide extra documentation of our health status, or be scrutinized and intimidated if we need additional assistance, or have to overcome additional barriers?

Why should the disability community have to pay to visit a doctor to obtain a note to prove disability? This is just like a poll tax – especially for those who live on a lower or fixed income through no fault of their own.

We must all have an equal ability to contribute to society and participate in our civic duty, and we expect equitable access to vote and to use mandated accommodations if needed.

The Texas Legislature must, in consultation with the disability community, correct discriminatory voting practices and eliminate barriers to the voting process.

We have an expression in the disability community: Nothing About Us Without Us!

The Texas organizations listed in this letter are all committed to contributing to lawmakers' discussion as they craft legislation that strengthens elections and does not inhibit the vote of people with disabilities, people of color, and low-income Texans.

Power the Texas Disability Vote!

REV UP Texas
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities
Texas State Independent Living Centers
League of Women Voters of Texas
Texas Parent to Parent
ADAPT of Texas
American Council of the Blind of Texas
Texas Advocates
Personal Attendant Coalition of Texas (PACT)
Register2Vote
Autism Society of Texas
Texas Democrats with Disabilities
Accessible Housing Austin
Brazoria Center for Independent Living
Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living
channelAustin
Children's Association for Maximum Potential
Desert ADAPT
disABILITYsa
Fort Bend Center for Independent Living
Gulf Coast ADAPT
Houston Center for Independent Living
REACH, Inc. dba REACH Resource Centers on Independent Living-Fort Worth, Dallas,
Denton & Plano
RISE Center for independent Living
Sign Shares International & The Capsule Group, Inc.
Volar Center for Independent Living
