

# **Voting Rights for Elderly and Disabled Persons in Washington State**

State and federal law sets forth a number of requirements and standards regarding accessibility in polling places and assistance for elderly and disabled voters. The following is a summary of polling place accessibility standards and the types of assistance available from county auditors and the Secretary of State

## **Accessibility Standards**

State and local election officials are required, wherever possible, to designate and use polling places which are accessible to all voters (Washington state has one of the highest polling place accessibility rates in the nation). In instances where a polling place does not meet accessibility standards, election officials must provide additional assistance to elderly and disabled voters assigned to that polling place.

The accessibility standards require:

- A signed disabled parking space for available off-street parking
- Signs identifying an accessible route of travel to the polling place if it is different than the primary route
- An unobstructed route of travel to the polling place
- Level, firm, stable and slip-resistant surfaces
- An unobstructed area for voting

- At least one voting booth with a maximum height of 30" and a minimum knee clearance of 27"
- Sufficient lighting along the accessible route of travel and within the polling place.

### **Types of Assistance Available to Elderly and Disabled Voters**

The Secretary of State and County Auditors are required to provide specific types of assistance to elderly and disabled persons for federal elections.

County Auditors and Election Departments are required to provide:

- Notice of accessibility of polling places in the notice of election published before the primary and the general election in even-numbered years
- A written notice to voters assigned to an inaccessible polling place explaining the factors which make that polling place inaccessible. This notice must be provided no later than 30 days prior to a federal election
- Reassignment to an accessible polling place upon advance request from a voter assigned to an inaccessible site
- Instructions and a request form for an absentee ballot or an ongoing absentee ballot
- Voting instructions printed in bold type at each polling place on election day
- Registration instructions printed in bold type at each voter registration facility
- Assistance from two election officials of opposite political parties or a person of the voter's choice for any voter unable to record his or her vote.

The Secretary of State is required to provide:

- Public notice before the primary and the general election in even-numbered years regarding:
  - availability of voter registration and voting aids
  - assistance to elderly and disabled voters
  - procedures for voting by absentee ballot
- The official Washington State Voters Pamphlet
- Braille and cassette-tape copies of the state Voters Pamphlet
- Toll-free Voter Information Hotline (1-800-448-4881)
- Toll-free TDD Voter information Hotline for the hearing-impaired (1-800-422-8683)

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