

GUIDELINES AND DEFINITIONS
ISSUED BY THE SECRETARY OF THE COMMONWEALTH
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FEDERAL VOTING ACCESSIBILITY FOR
THE ELDERLY AND HANDICAPPED ACT (P.L. 98-435)

Pursuant to the provisions of Public Law 98-435, Federal Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and the Handicapped Act, the Secretary of the Commonwealth has established guidelines and procedures to follow to determine if polling locations in the Commonwealth comply with the Act. The following includes the guidelines and definition of terms used in the guidelines and the survey.

Note: For purposes of implementation of this Act, the Secretary of the Commonwealth considers “handicapped” to include those electors with a permanent or temporary impairment of mobility, hearing or vision which significantly interferes with their ability to use a polling place. It includes those who use a wheel chair and those who are ambulatory but who are, nevertheless, impaired by age, disability or disease.

Guidelines for Determining Polling Place Accessibility

An accessible polling place shall be one, which provides at least one parking space for elderly electors, and electors with a disability and a barrier-free route from the parking facility to the voting machine/booth inside the polling place. The elector should be able to approach and enter the building, reach the voting room, vote and leave the building without climbing one or more stairs. The surfaces of the walkways leading from the parking space(s) to the polling place shall have a stable, firm, slip-resistant surface, even when wet. Ramps on the route from the parking space(s) to the polling place should have a slope no greater than one inch in height for each foot of ramp. All ramps, with the exception of curb ramps, must have handrails.

The parking space(s) reserved for electors with a disability must be designated as such. The space(s) should be a minimum of 12 feet wide to allow space for an elector in a wheelchair to enter and exit a vehicle and provide unobstructed access to the walkway, which leads to the polling place. The reserved parking space(s) should be located on the shortest possible route to an accessible entrance to the polling place building. A temporary space may be set up on election day to satisfy the requirements of this guideline.

The route from the parking space to the polling place building should be at least 36 inches wide and include curb cuts, curb ramps where needed and ramps over steps. The walkway should have no slopes that are more than one inch in height for each foot in length.

The doors to the building should be able to be opened easily by a frail person or one using a wheelchair. Doorsills to thresholds should be one-half inch or less in height and doorways must be at least 32 inches wide. Corridors should be at least 36 inches wide. If an elevator must be used by a voter to get to the polling place, it should be large enough (4 feet by 4 feet) for a wheelchair. An elector using a wheelchair should be able to enter the elevator easily and reach all controls.

Definitions

The following terms are defined for the purpose of implementation of the Federal Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act.

- 1) “Accessible” means accessible to handicapped and elderly individuals for the purpose of voting or registration, as determined under guidelines established by the chief election officer of the State involved.
- 2) “Barrier-free route” means a continuous unobstructed path connecting all accessible elements and spaces in a building; facility or site that can be negotiated by a disabled person using a wheelchair, and that is also safe for and usable by people with other disabilities.
- 3) “Curb ramp” means a short ramp used to bridge a level change at a curb; curb ramps may be cut through the curb (curb cut).
- 4) “Elderly” means 65 years of age or older.
- 5) “Federal election” means a general, special, primary, or run-off election for the office of President or Vice President, or of Senator or Representative in, or Delegate or Resident Commissioner to, the Congress.
- 6) “Handicapped” means having a temporary or permanent physical disability.
- 7) “Polling place” means the room provided in each election district for voting at a primary or election.
- 8) “Polling place building” means the building in which the polling place is located.