



Voting

The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Position:

Voting is a fundamental right and the bedrock of our democracy. Therefore, Missouri must make sure that citizens – with and without disabilities – have a full, fair, and equal opportunity to vote accessibly and privately in local, state, and national elections.

The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Reasons:

When people vote, they have a say in and can shape local and state policies and practices that affect their quality of life.¹ Federal laws – including the Fourteenth Amendment, the Voting Rights Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act – aim to protect people with disabilities' rights and opportunities to vote.² However, research shows that people with disabilities vote less often than people without disabilities, with a recent national study finding that only 37% of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities receiving state services had ever voted or were given the opportunity to do so.³ Studies show that a number of factors positively and negatively impact people with disabilities' opportunities to vote: for example, people who live in group settings are less likely to vote⁴ and many people with disabilities are unable to vote due to lack of transportation⁵ and inaccessible voting places.⁶ Conversely, people with disabilities who receive education about voting⁷ and participate in self-advocacy organizations and events⁸ are more likely to vote.

In Missouri, only 25% of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities receiving state services have voted or had the opportunity to do so, significantly less than the national average.⁹ Missouri ranks 47th in the United States in spending on transportation, negatively impacting many Missourians ability to take part in civic and community activities such as voting.¹⁰ Worse, a 2018 study found that Missouri removed 10,018 people with disabilities from the voter rolls due to "mental incapacitation or incompetence," the most in the nation and more than twice the next closest state.¹¹ In 2022, a county clerk stated that she would remove all people under guardianship from the voter rolls, even if a court order preserved their right to vote.¹²

The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Recommendations:

- As a state and society, we must acknowledge that the right to vote is the most sacred in our democracy and ensure that all citizens, with and without disabilities, have full, fair, and equal opportunities to vote in local, state, and national elections.
- Missouri law, policy, and practice should ensure that people under guardianship have the right to vote unless a court order specifically removes that right.
- Missouri law, policy, and practice should ensure that people with disabilities have ample and accessible voting options, including accessible in-person, absentee, and mail-in voting.
- Missouri should inspect each voting location to ensure that it is accessible to people with disabilities and meets the accessibility standards set out in the U.S. Department of Justice ADA Checklist for Polling Places.¹³
- Missouri state agencies and providers should give people with disabilities information and education on voting as a part of the services they offer.
- Missouri providers should ensure that people with disabilities they support have transportation to and from their voting locations or are able to access other voting options.
- Missouri state agencies and providers should encourage people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to take part in voter education programs such as the Self Advocates Becoming Empowered Go Voter Project.¹⁴
- Missouri state agencies and private employers should give employees leave from work to vote.
- Missouri policy and practice should increase access to public and private transportation and ensure that citizens throughout the state are able to take part in community and civic activities, such as voting.
- Missouri public schools should provide students with disabilities with information on voting including how to register to vote as a part of their Individualized Education Programs and 504 Plans.

References

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- ¹² Sheeley, A. (2022). Incapacitated to be removed from voting rolls, even against court order. *Phelps County Focus*. Available at: https://www.phelpscountyfocus.com/article_47dda074-dd1d-11ec-b815-cfb535ca4a1b.html. Only advocacy from self advocates and several groups, including the Developmental Disabilities Council prevented this from happening. See, https://www.phelpscountyfocus.com/news/article_ff39aba-e296-11ec-a4b2-5ba0afdc9301.html#:~:text=School%20News-.Incapacitated%20will%20not%20be%20removed%20from%20voting,court%20order%2C%20county%20clerk%20announces&text=Phelp%20County%20Clerk%20Pamela%20K,mental%20capacity%20needed%20to%20vote .
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