

EXERCISING THE RIGHT TO VOTE: FALL 2020



WHY VOTE?

Throughout U.S. history, Americans have fought—and Americans have died—for the right to vote. Voting honors that history and is an important way to have an influence on the community, the state and the country. Voting strengthens the voices of individuals within the government and may influence policies that affect their lives. However, not everyone who is eligible to vote does so. In fact, according to the Pew Research Center, 4 out of 10 Americans did not vote who were eligible for voting in the 2016 presidential election.

Historically, individuals diagnosed with mental illnesses have faced barriers to voting. To date, most states have laws that, in some form or another, limit the rights of citizens with mental illnesses to vote. However, studies have shown that no evidence exists that people diagnosed with serious mental illnesses are any less able to make informed political choices than other Americans, and that this applies even to people who are hospitalized or under guardianships.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Many laws have been enacted that support the rights of citizens diagnosed with mental illnesses to vote. These include the Americans with Disabilities Act, the National Voter Registration Act, the Voting Rights Act and the Help America Vote Act. Listed below are some of the rights every citizen preparing to vote should know:

- Citizens can register to vote almost any time. Since the National Voter Registration Act was passed in 1993, most state agencies and state-funded programs providing disability services are now required to offer year-round voter registration.
- All citizens are allowed to cast a ballot. Therefore, even if an individual with a mental illness is denied the right to vote, he or she must be allowed to submit a Provisional Ballot. An election worker will later decide if the individual is eligible to vote. If the individual is deemed eligible, then the Provisional Ballot will be counted.

- Individuals who have been hospitalized, either voluntarily or involuntarily, still have the right to vote. In order to do so they must register and, prior to the election, request and complete an absentee ballot.

HOW TO FIND OR GIVE SUPPORT

Getting people interested in politics—that is, the civic life of their community, their state and their country—is the first step. Various websites and radio stations such as National Public Radio will often have information about a candidate’s background and agenda. If you need help voting, assistance can be provided by friends, family members, a poll worker or any other trusted individual you choose.

MAKE A VOTING PLAN

Voting processes for the 2020 election are unique due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this, many US citizens are voting by mail. Whether you are voting in person or by mail, you can use this worksheet to make a plan that ensures your vote will be counted. Take advantage of the resources listed on the last page of this document to find out if you are registered to vote and find your polling place.



2020 VOTING PLAN

I AM REGISTERED TO VOTE:

YES

NO

I AM VOTING:

BY MAIL

IN PERSON

IF VOTING BY MAIL, I AM DROPPING
OFF MY BALLOT ON THIS DATE:

DATE: _____

IF VOTING BY MAIL, I AM DROPPING
OFF MY BALLOT AT THIS LOCATION:

ADDRESS: _____

I AM VOTING IN PERSON AT THIS
LOCATION:

ADDRESS: _____

MY PLAN FOR GETTING TO MY POLLING
PLACE IS:

-GET A RIDE

-PUBLIC TRANSIT

-WALK/BIKE

-DRIVE

I AM GETTING A RIDE FROM THIS PERSON
TO MY POLLING PLACE:

NAME: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

I AM GOING TO MY POLLING PLACE AT THIS
TIME ON NOV. 3RD:

TIME: _____

VOTING RESOURCES

ELECTION PROTECTION WEBSITE: <https://866ourvote.org/>

THIS NON-PARTISAN ORGANIZATION PROVIDES SUPPORT TO EVERYONE WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE VOTING PROCESS ACROSS THE US. THIS WEBSITE PROVIDES INFORMATION ON VOTER REGISTRATION, GETTING TO YOUR POLLING PLACE, AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES.

ELECTION PROTECTION HOTLINE: 1-866-OurVote (1-866-687-8683)

CALL AND SPEAK WITH A VOLUNTEER ABOUT VOTING RIGHTS, MAIL-IN BALLOTS, AND ANY OTHER INFORMATION YOU NEED TO KNOW IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.

ADVOCACY: <https://mhanys.org/voterempowerment/>

GET INVOLVED WITH ADVOCACY GROUPS SUCH AS THE MENTAL HEALTH VOTER EMPOWERMENT PROJECT. BASED IN NEW YORK, THIS GROUP REGISTERS VOTERS, SENDS THEM EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL AND REMINDERS OF UPCOMING ELECTIONS, AND INVITES THEM TO ACTIVITIES TO FACILITATE VOTING.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: <http://www.bazelon.org/our-work/voting/>
FIND IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON VOTING RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES FROM THE BAZELON CENTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH LAW.

STAY INFORMED: <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/>

AS VOTERS, WE WANT TO MAKE THE MOST INFORMED DECISION WE CAN WHEN CHOOSING WHO TO VOTE FOR. THIS INTERACTIVE WEBSITE ALLOWS YOU TO IDENTIFY THE ISSUES THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN THE ELECTION AND SHOWS YOU WHICH CANDIDATE'S POLICIES MOST ALIGN WITH YOUR POLITICAL VALUES.