

Helping Maryland Vote

an election judge's guide to assisting
voters with disabilities

For more information:

Maryland Disability Law Center

410.727.6352

800.233.7201

TTY: 410.235.5387



Many eligible voters in Maryland have a disability.



An election judge plays a large role
helping citizens access the ballot

table of contents

access

- ensure polling site is accessible
- be an effective communicator
- be familiar with the accessible voting unit

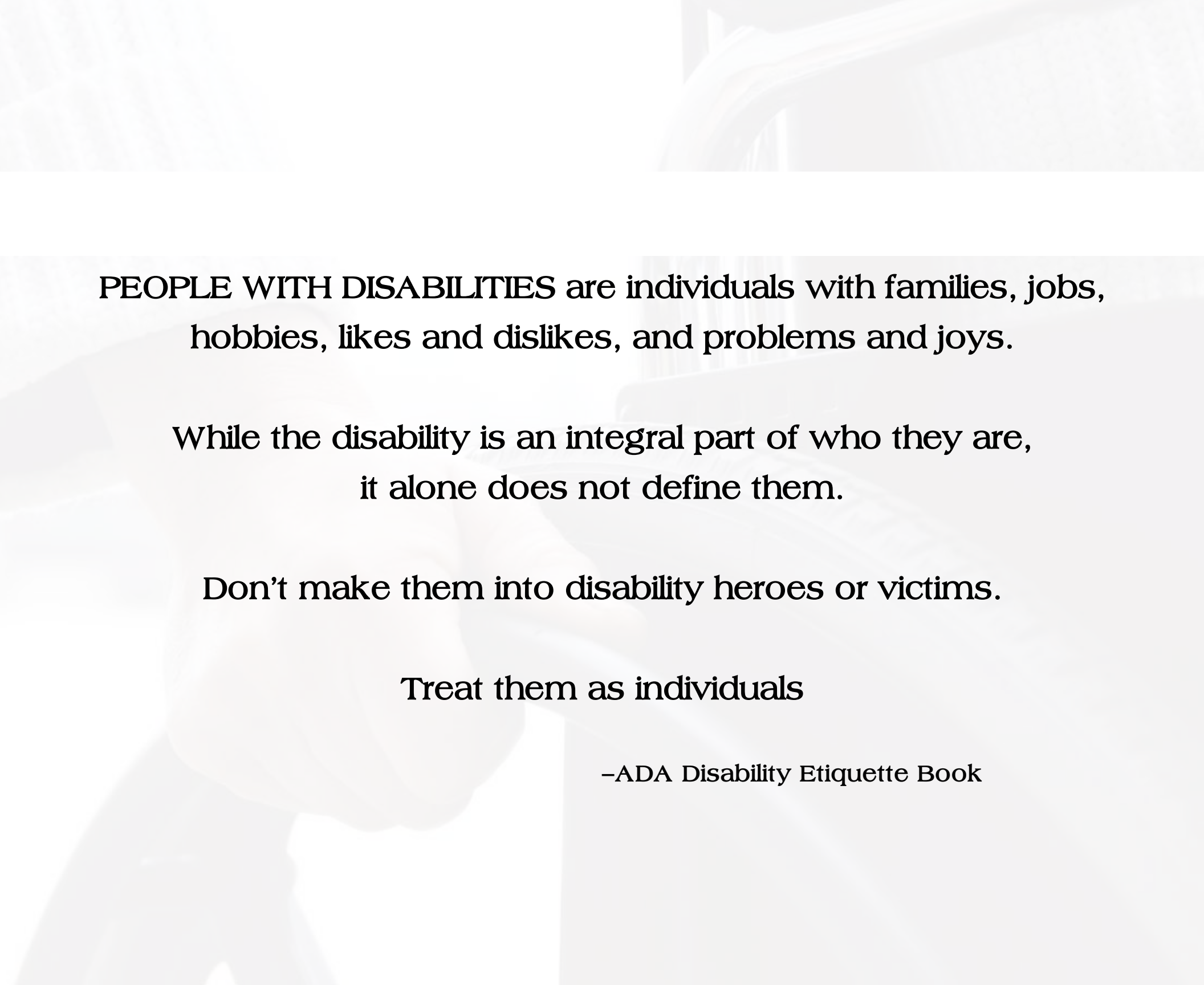
assist

- assist voters with all types of needs

accommodate

- locate & use election accommodations

resources



PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES are individuals with families, jobs, hobbies, likes and dislikes, and problems and joys.

While the disability is an integral part of who they are, it alone does not define them.

Don't make them into disability heroes or victims.

Treat them as individuals

–ADA Disability Etiquette Book

“permission, liberty, or ability
to enter, approach, or pass
to and from a place or to
approach or communicate
with a person or thing.”

—merriam-webster dictionary



access.

is your polling site accessible?

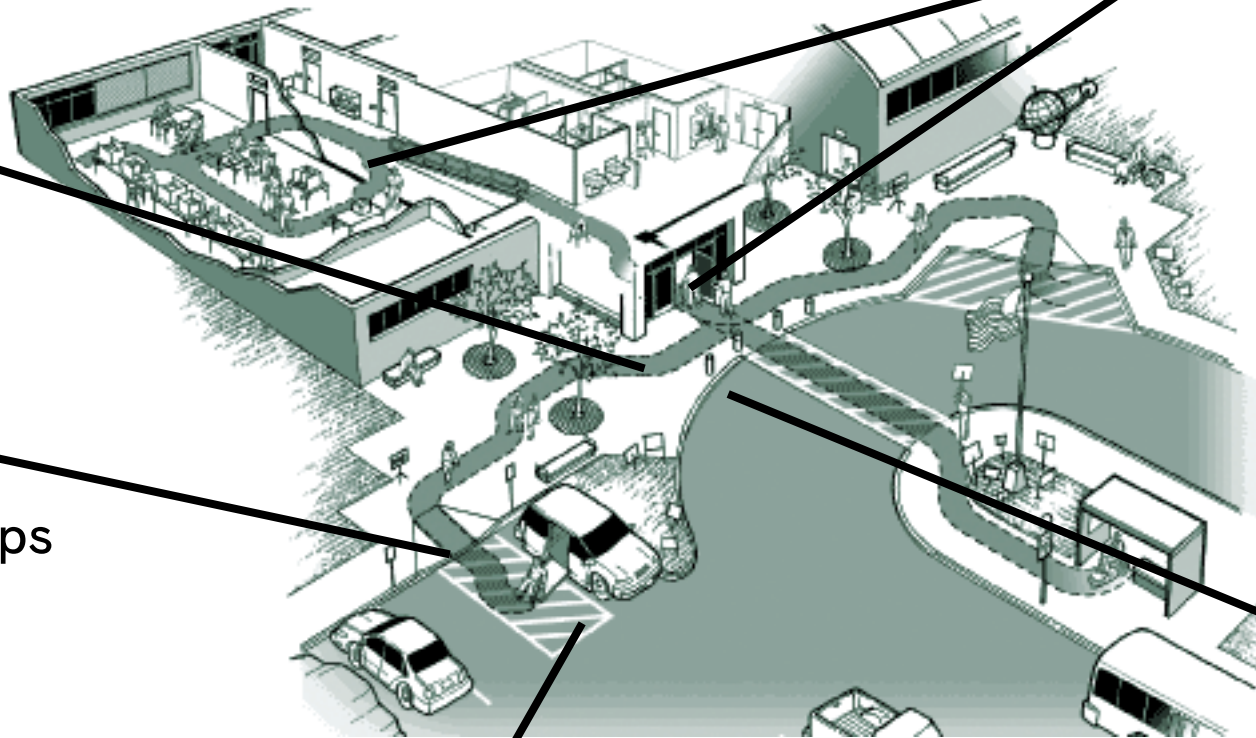
Barrier-Free
Pathways

Wide Doors
& Hallways

Curb Cuts
or Ramps

Accessible Parking

Signs for
the Accessible
Entrance



poll site accessibility checklist

Parking...

- ✓ Accessible spaces are close to the entrance.
- ✓ The passenger drop-off zone is level. (if applicable)
- ✓ Accessible spaces are marked with signs.
- ✓ There are enough accessible spaces. (min. 1 van accessible space per every 25 regular spaces)

Walkways are...

- ✓ Wide enough for a wheelchair or walker. (min. 32 in.)
- ✓ Free of debris, snow, and ice.
- ✓ Marked with signs clearly pointing voters to the accessible entrance.

At Check-In...

- ✓ Magnifying devices (if available) are out and ready to be used.
- ✓ Seating is available for voters who need it while waiting.

Inside the Polling Site...

- ✓ All doors have levers or push bar handles.
- ✓ All doors on the accessible route are unlocked and can be opened by the voter.
- ✓ Accessible pathway inside the polling site is free of hanging or obtruding objects.
- ✓ Doors, hallways, & the voting areas are wide enough to maneuver a wheelchair.
- ✓ Temporary ramps are placed in the proper locations and elevators are in working condition.





The voting process can be intimidating, especially because most citizens only vote every two to four years. As the person voters will go to for assistance, know that there are different communication needs you might encounter.

do you help make voting accessible?

understanding effective voter communication

Depending on his or her disability, a voter may require:

- ☑ Assistive Technology (see glossary)
- ☑ Pen & Paper
- ☑ Lip-reading
- ☑ American Sign Language Interpreter

Remember to be patient:

- ☑ Some voters communicate in a way that may be difficult to understand.
They may require an assistant to help translate.
- ☑ Allow voters time to finish their thoughts or actions.
- ☑ Repetition may be necessary, for you or the voter.



Anyone can assist a voter except a candidate who is on the voter's ballot, the voter's employer or agent of the employer, or an officer or agent of a voter's union. If the voter does not have someone with them, he or she can be assisted by two election judges representing different political parties.

see Maryland Annotated Code, Election Law, § 10-310(c)
and Code of Maryland Regulations 33.07.05.02

Make no assumptions
Ask if assistance is needed
Allow space for the voter to speak
Listen
Communicate directly with the voter
Use People First Language
Speak at a normal volume unless otherwise asked
Repeat yourself as often as needed
Open doors
Answer questions
Give directions
Guide a voter around the polling place
Complete voting forms
Adjust voting unit
Activate voting unit accessibility features
Read the ballot for a voter
Demonstrate respect



assist.

respect the voter...

As election judges, you are responsible for offering assistance to every voter.

Remember:

Be Respectful

Voters with disabilities want to be treated the same as everyone else. Show them the same respect you expect to receive.

Use People First Language

Always put the person before their disability:

“Person who is blind.”

“Voter who uses a wheelchair.”

Address the Voter

Some voters may have an assistant or an interpreter.

Always look at and speak to the voter, not the assistant.


Just Ask

Offer assistance to every voter. However, don't automatically assist unless the voter clearly needs help or has asked for assistance.

...relax and use common sense

can i assist you?

assisting voters with physical or mobility disabilities



Filling out
paperwork.

Adjusting the
voting unit for my
wheelchair.

Removing barriers
from my path.

Opening a door.



“No, thank you.”

**Respect the voter's request.
Proceed with checking in the voter.**



helpful notes

- When communicating with a voter who uses a wheelchair, give them some space and speak with them at their eye level.
- When helping someone take a step or move, ask which is the best way to do so.



Important

Every polling place is required by law to have an accessible voting unit.
Make sure you know how to adjust this machine for voters using a wheelchair.

If you do not, ask your *chief election judge*.

can i assist you?

assisting voters with sensory & speech related disabilities



Changing the color
contrast on the
voting unit.

Using the audio
headset on the
voting unit.

Knowing where
to go.

Communicating.

“No, thank you.”

**Respect the voter's request.
Proceed with checking in the voter.**



helpful notes

Voters who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Let the voter establish how they want to communicate. Examples include: paper & pen, lip-reading, and sign language.
- Directly face the voter when you speak. Speak normally and respectfully.
- Be prepared to move to a quieter area if necessary.



Voters who have a Visual Disability

- Always verbally identify yourself and others.
- When guiding someone, ask the best way to do so. Describe any obstacles as you approach them.
- Guide Dogs - Do not pet or distract a guide dog. It is responsible for its owner's safety.



helpful notes

Voters With a Disability That Affects Speech

- Be attentive, patient and always allow the voter to complete their thoughts.
- Repetition is a normal part of conversation. Indicate if you do not understand.
- Voters may use different forms of assistive technology to speak for them or to help them communicate.



Always communicate with the voter,
NOT their interpreter or assistant.





Important

Every polling place is required by law to have an accessible voting unit. Make sure you know how to activate the machine and its accessible features.

Accessibility features include adjustments, audio headset, color contrast, or accessible touchpad.

can i assist you?

assisting voters with cognitive & intellectual disabilities



"Yes, I need help..."

Simplifying all the
steps to casting
a ballot.

Understanding
how the voting
machine works.

Reading
the ballot.

Communicating.

"No, thank you."

**Respect the voter's request.
Proceed with checking in the voter.**



helpful notes

Voters With a Cognitive Disability That Affects Communication

- Keep your communication simple and respectful.
- Stay on point by focusing on one topic at a time.
- Repetition - If appropriate, repeat back any messages to confirm mutual understanding.
- Allow the voter time to respond, ask questions, and clarify your comments.
- Focus on the person, paying attention to any body language or gestures.

Excerpted from Tennessee Disability Coalition; *Disability Etiquette: Engaging People with Disabilities*



“to give consideration”

“make room for”

“find a suitable fit”

“to provide helpful service
as desired or needed”

—merriam-webster dictionary



accommodate.

there are many accommodations
provided by your local
board of elections

You may be familiar
with some of them



Some accommodations for voters with
vision loss may include keypads on
voting units or materials in large print
(if available).



Provide extra seating as needed.

navigate

- Signs & cones to create accessible parking spaces
- Temporary ramps for wheelchair access
- Signs to help mark the accessible path
- Door knob converters (for hard-to-open doors)
- Allowance for one voter to serve as a placeholder for another who cannot stand in line
- Seating for voters who cannot stand for long periods of time
- At least one voting unit that can be adjusted for for a voter using a wheelchair



communicate

- Voter-owned communication boxes
 - Voter's choice of companion or assistant to help them communicate





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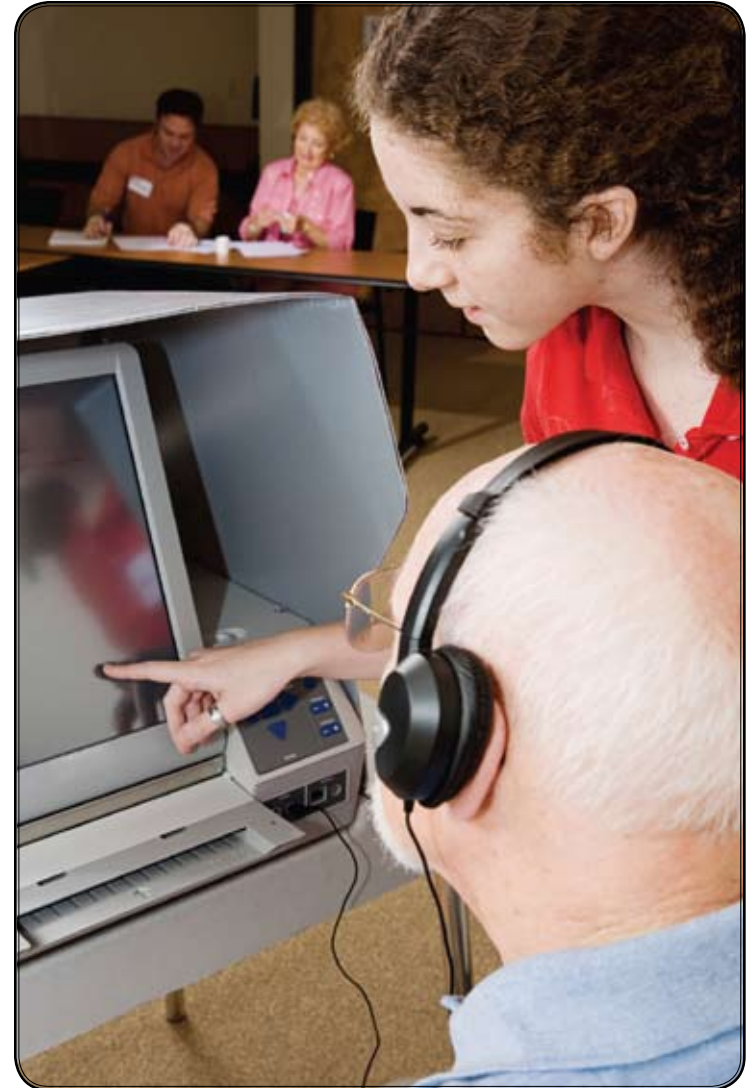


participate: vision & audio aids

- Magnifying lenses (if available)
- Signature guides to help voters sign their name (if available)
- At least one voting unit in every polling place that offers:
 - ...Headphones for voters to hear their ballot
 - ...Color contrasts on the voting screen, such as white text on a black background, for voters to read their ballot

other voter accommodations

- Voters may bring completed sample ballots to help remember their selection.
- Voters may request assistance from a election judge or someone of their choice.



Accessibility:

permission, liberty, or ability to enter to and from a place or to approach or communicate with a person or thing

Accommodations:

something supplied for convenience or to satisfy a need

American Sign Language (ASL):

the primary language of many individuals who are deaf, conveyed by a system of articulated hand gestures in relation to the upper body

Assistance:

to give support or aid

Assistive Technology:

assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices used to aid people with disabilities in everyday activities such as communication and mobility; e.g. electronic communication devices, voter-owned voice boxes, screen readers for people with vision loss, etc.

—merriam-webster dictionary

Braille:

a system of writing for the blind that uses characters made up of raised dots

Cognitive Disability:

a disability that affects conscious intellectual activity such as thinking, reasoning, or remembering

HAVA:

the Help America Vote Act of 2002; mandates every precinct to have one voting unit that is accessible to people with disabilities, statewide voter registration database, provisional ballots, and a system to check for errors

People First Language:

the practice of referring to the person before their disability

Examples: “Woman with cerebral palsy” “Voter with vision loss”
 “Man with Down Syndrome” “Someone who uses a wheelchair”

Physical Disability:

a disability that affects mobility in any part of the body

Sensory Disability:

a disability that affects the senses, including vision, hearing, and touch

Signature Guides:

a plastic mask with an opening to correspond with a standard signature area





Maryland State House; Annapolis, MD

voting rights in maryland

As a registered voter, you have the right to:

1. Vote and have your vote be accurately counted
2. Cast a ballot secretly and independently
3. Have voting be as convenient and accessible as possible
4. Vote without discrimination, intimidation, or coercion
5. Vote if you're in line at 8:00 pm
6. Ask for and receive help when voting
7. Select anyone to assist you except a candidate who is on your ballot, your employer or agent of your employer, or an officer or agent of your union
8. Cast a provisional ballot if your eligibility to vote is in doubt
9. Have complaints about an alleged voting rights violation resolved fairly, accurately, and efficiently

Maryland Disability Law Center: 410.727.6352 or 800.233.7201

Maryland State Board of Elections: 410.269.2840 or 800.222.8683

Local County Election Office: (Varies)

election judge resources

- **Maryland Disability Law Center**

www.MDLClaw.org

Phone: 410.727.6352

Toll Free: 1.800.233.7201

- **Maryland State Board of Elections**

www.Elections.State.MD.us

Phone: 410.269.2840

Toll Free: 800.222.8683

- **Election Assistance Commission**

www.EAC.gov

- **National Technical Assistance Center for Voting & Cognitive Access**

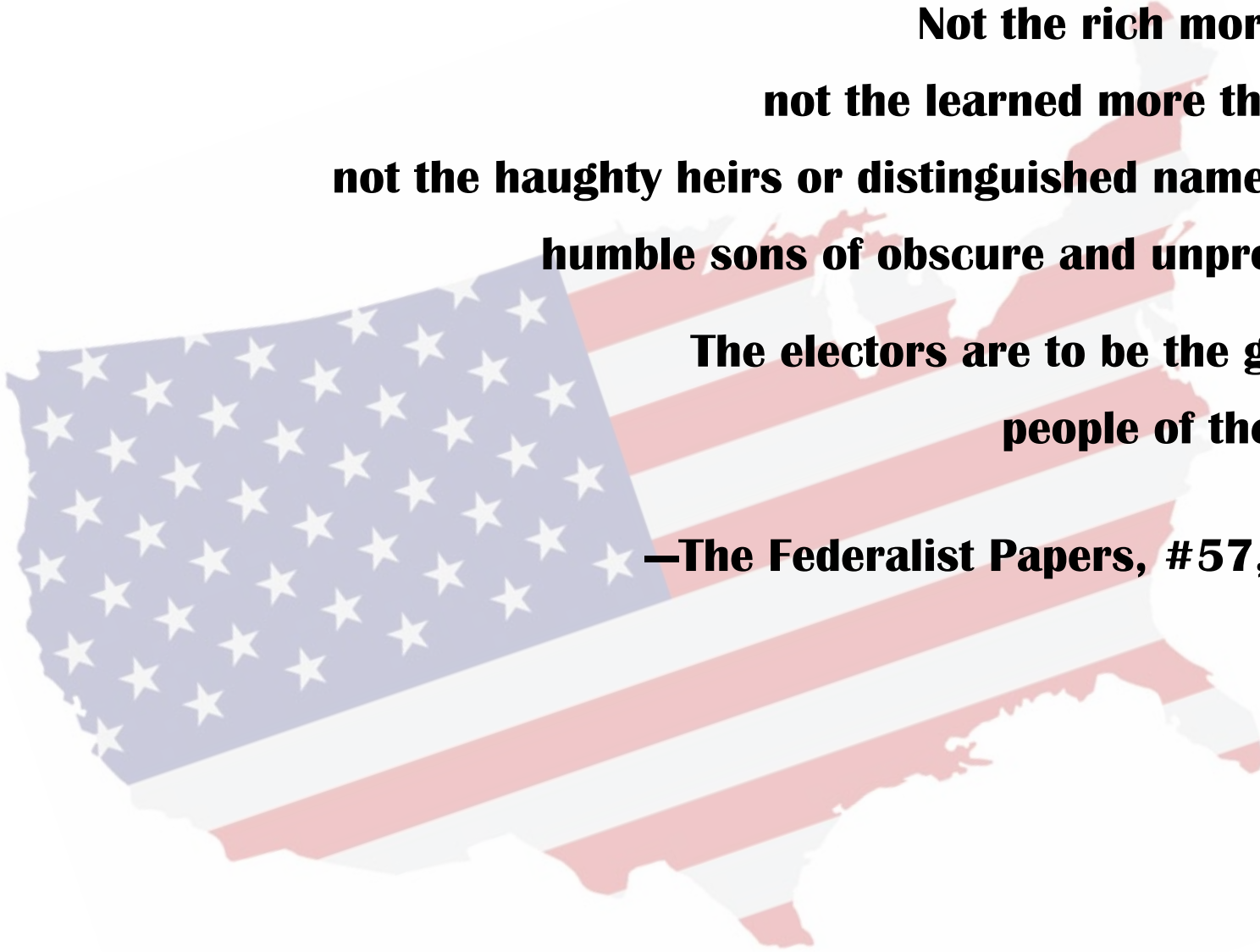
www.GoVoter.org

“Who are to be the electors of the Federal Representatives?”

**Not the rich more than the poor;
not the learned more than the ignorant;
not the haughty heirs or distinguished names more than the
humble sons of obscure and unpropitious fortune.**

**The electors are to be the great body of the
people of the United States.”**

—The Federalist Papers, #57, James Madison



thank you

you make a difference when you
help maryland vote

Maryland Disability Law Center
www.MDLClaw.org • 800.233.7201



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www.DLAtn.org



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