

For many social minorities, the path to gain voting rights was long, hard fought, and not linear. Early United States voting rights excluded people of color, women, and people with disabilities - only giving access to White able-bodied male citizens. Because of decades of advocacy which resulted in constitutional amendments and other policies, today women and people of color also have the right to vote. However, many social minorities are still disenfranchised because of both formal and informal policies and practices. Moreover, despite the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights saying people have the right to take part in their government, many people with disabilities are still denied this right in the United States.

Most citizens have the right to vote if over the age of 18. Some states, however, have archaic laws that may prevent some people with disabilities from voting if they have a guardian, have a specific disability, or have been convicted of a felony. Rights advocates are working to get these laws changed. But in most states, people can vote as long as they are registered to vote. It is important that people know the laws in their state and what is needed to register to vote. Many states now require a government issued picture ID to vote. People also need to learn where, when, and how to vote. Some people may need a person of choice to assist them, or other legal accommodations, to exercise this right, like absentee balloting or voting by mail. Voting is all about choice and is a private matter that should not be judged.

Part of this right is about participating as a citizen in one's government. This can mean serving on a jury if called to do so, speaking publicly about an issue being debated in a city, county, state or national forum, peacefully marching and protesting to express an opinion about an issue, supporting a candidate running for office, or actually running for office. People can also demonstrate good citizenship in many other ways, like helping take care of their environment by not littering, volunteering to clean up public areas, and by recycling. People can obey laws, like the pedestrian and traffic laws. All of this adds up to good citizenship!

## **RIGHTS**

- Be informed of how to register and vote.
- Register and vote, if 18 years old.
- Vote in private and secret.
- Support and campaign for candidates of your choice.
- Contact your legislators and voice your opinion.
- Serve on a jury, if called to do so.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Know the laws about voting
- Respect other peoples' opinions, but make up your own mind
- Learn about the issues and the candidates
- Learn where, when, and how to vote
- Get help or accommodations, if needed
- Serve on a jury if called to do so
- Speak up but be honest and accurate

## **SUPPORTS**

- Provide education about laws on voting and other citizenship issues
- Support to register; if desired provide information about where, when and how to vote
- Provide access to free/low cost voter ID, if required.
- Make information about issues and candidates available and accessible.
- Provide assistance/ accommodations if needed for voting (like absentee ballots and voting by mail

## **Thoughts for Consideration:**

Factors that may influence why people with IDD do not exercise their right to vote

- Limited literacy skills
  - Little to no knowledge of issues related to voting
  - No opportunity to learn about candidates and their position on issues
  - Voting is never discussed
  - Discouraged from registering to vote
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- ✓ Poll your residences/programs to determine how many people are registered to vote.
  - ✓ How many people voted in a recent election?
  - ✓ Learn about the voting process through voter forums and online websites for NYC/NYS
  - ✓ Assist people with the process of registering to vote if they choose to vote
  - ✓ Organize a group of interested people to learn about voting and become informed on issues important to people with disabilities – Get Out the Vote
  - ✓ Individuals with disabilities can vote at their local polling place with the assistance of a person of their choice
  - ✓ Polling places in New York are required to be accessible. If a polling place is not accessible, contact the local board of elections and ask for an accommodation or an absentee ballot application
  - ✓ Discuss in Self Advocacy Groups as an election cycle draws near