

Ohio Secretary of State's Office ADA Advisory Committee

Overview

Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner's office is committed to providing accessible polling locations that will allow people with disabilities to vote with the independence and dignity they deserve. In order to help accomplish this, Secretary Brunner has established an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Advisory Committee to help direct the office's efforts in making Ohio a leader in access to the voting process and has appointed a full-time ADA Coordinator to provide leadership to the committee members and serve as a liaison to the other departments within the Secretary of State's office. The ADA Advisory Committee will be made up of various people with disabilities, disability agency representatives, disability advocacy organizations and other interested parties.

Committee Membership

Secretary Brunner expects the ADA Advisory Committee to consist of approximately 15 individuals who have a disability themselves, and/or are affiliated with the disability community, or individuals who are affiliated with someone with a disability. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to physical impairments, mental impairments, visual impairments, hearing impairments, and/or cognitive disabilities. Committee members will serve a term of one year for no more than two consecutive years.

Committee Member Responsibilities

The ADA Advisory Committee members will work under the supervision of the ADA Coordinator to: review Health and Human Services grant requests received from county Boards of Elections; provide insight and recommendations to the Secretary of State's office on access issues pertaining to voting; provide recommendations for poll worker sensitivity training provided by Boards of Elections; provide recommendations on how the Secretary of State's office can encourage people with disabilities to vote; and educate the community on access-related voting issues. Committee members are expected to attend at least one (1) meeting per month in performing these responsibilities.

Committee Funding

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) created four specific categories of election requirements relating to voters with disabilities; and each state is to implement these requirements using Health and Human Services (HHS) funds. Under the supervision of the ADA Coordinator, the four funding categories are as follows:

- 1. Polling place accessibility;**
- 2. Equal opportunity for access and participation in voting;**
- 3. Training election officials, poll workers and election volunteers on interacting with people with disabilities during the voting process;**
and
- 4. Providing information about accessibility of voting places to individuals with disabilities.**

Committee Member Involvement

The following is a breakdown of each category and how members of the Secretary of State's ADA Advisory Committee may be involved:

1. Polling Place Accessibility

All Boards of Elections must complete accessibility assessments for each polling location. Each board may then submit a request for grant funds that can be used to make their polling places accessible for voters with disabilities. ADA Advisory Committee members may provide assistance with accessibility assessments and/or recruit accessibility survey volunteers. Committee members may also assist with reviewing federal Health and Human Services grant funding requests received from the Boards. Based upon reviews, the committee will either recommend approval or request additional information for each grant request. Members may share suggestions for alternative solutions and provide recommendations for each request received.

2. Equal Opportunity for Access and Participation in Voting

ADA Committee members may assist and advise election officials on outreach, including how to educate people with disabilities on the use of accessible voting machines and what accommodations are available to help them vote. Committee members may also work with election officials to recommend implementation of general voter education programs for people with disabilities.

3. Training Election Officials, Poll Workers and Election Volunteers

ADA Committee members may assist in creating a statewide curriculum to help Boards of Elections uniformly educate poll workers on how to interact with people with disabilities during the voting process. Members may give suggestions on best practices and procedures for interacting with voters with various types of disabilities. Occasionally members may be invited to attend regional meetings conducted by Board of Elections throughout the state to present a "Train the Trainer" session. This session will teach Board Directors, Deputy Directors, and other staff common courtesy practices that can then be taught to election volunteers, poll workers, and other election officials.

4. Providing Information About Accessibility to Individuals With Disabilities

ADA Committee members will advise the Secretary of State's office on how to promote and distribute information on voting to voters with disabilities. Members may suggest the types of information to include on the Secretary of State's Web site, how to display such information, and create various election-related publications in alternative formats. Representatives from the Secretary of State's office will attend various disability organizations' conferences, workshops, and seminars to further educate people with disabilities on their voting rights and encourage voter registration.

More Information

If you have an interest in serving on the Secretary of State's ADA Advisory Committee, please contact Brett Harbage, ADA Coordinator, at bharbage@sos.state.oh.us or (614) 387-6039.