

Voters with disabilities face barriers at polls

November 6 2013, by Mary Catt And Laura Carver

Today, polls across America will be open – not for everyone, though.

Some [voters](#) with disabilities will not exercise their right to vote – a constitutional guarantee for U.S. citizens – because some voting booths are inaccessible.

"Voting equality has been a long-fought struggle for people with disabilities," said Wendy Strobel Gower, director of the Northeast Americans with Disabilities Act Center at the ILR School's Employment and Disability Institute. "Often, polling places are not accessible; some people with disabilities can't even get into the buildings to vote. When they can get in, they often can't use the voting tools provided, and poll workers have to help them cast a ballot. This takes away their right to [vote](#) confidentially."

A 2012 study found [voter turnout](#) of [people with disabilities](#) was almost 6 percent less than for people without disabilities, 30 percent of voters with disabilities vs. 8 percent without disabilities reported having difficulty voting at a polling place.

Across the country, disability advocates are fighting what they consider a breach of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires that all state and local governments ensure "program access," including voting.

The Northeast ADA Center at ILR has assembled a fact sheet, available in English and Spanish, to help voters with [disabilities](#) understand their

rights.

The Center for Disability Rights is starting the New York Disability Vote Network, Gower said. It is designed to build and unify the disability voting bloc to enact positive changes on a state level.

"Across the state and elsewhere in the nation, there are pockets of equal accessibility," she said. "But there is a long way to go."

Provided by Cornell University

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