



Disability  
Rights  
Oregon

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
October 7, 2020

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## Advocates work to lift barriers to voting faced by Oregonians with disabilities during COVID-19 pandemic

### County election workers now allowed to visit nursing homes, long-term care facilities to help voters fill out their ballot

Portland, Oregon—Voting with a disability can be a challenge during a typical election. Voting with a disability during the COVID-19 pandemic poses new hurdles for thousands of Oregonians. Statewide advocacy organization Disability Rights Oregon (DRO) is working to lift those barriers to ensure that Oregonians with disabilities can still exercise their right to vote.

Last month, DRO worked with the Aging and People with Disabilities program to ensure that county election workers who provide accommodations for voters with disabilities living in long-term care settings count as “essential workers”. That designation will allow them to continue to provide voting accommodations at nursing homes and other care facilities. These accommodations mean fewer mistakes that could otherwise keep a person's vote from being counted.

“Oregon’s disability community is a diverse community full of people passionate about a range of issues, especially ones that affect their everyday lives,” said Tom Stenson, Deputy Legal Director for Disability Rights Oregon. “Ensuring that people with disabilities can exercise their right to vote like every other eligible adult is a cornerstone of a thriving, strong democracy.”

**Accommodations for Voters who are Blind or Low-Vision:** Voters who are blind or low-vision may also face barriers during the pandemic. Traditionally in Oregon, voters who are

blind or low-vision can receive hands-on assistance with in-person voting from the county clerk's office. DRO is encouraging those voters to consult with their county's clerk's office early to find appropriate accommodations. County clerks' offices may offer an accessible, electronic version of the ballot that allows the voter to use software that reads it out loud. Voters can order a large-print ballot. Those ballots can be helpful for people who are blind or low-vision who can read them with their glasses or magnifier.

**Lake County Drop Boxes:** DRO also worked with the state elections office to restore two election drop box sites in Lake County that were removed by the County Clerk ahead of the November 2020 General Election. The drop box sites were in Christmas Valley and Paisley. The advocacy organization was concerned that the removal of the drop box sites would create a disproportionate burden on voters with disabilities who can't drive because of their disability and result in unequal access to the ballot drop boxes.

People with disabilities have the same right to cast a private and independent ballot as other Oregonians. Yet, people with disabilities vote at lower rates than other people. This is especially true for people with intellectual or self-care disabilities. Organizations across the country are working to increase turnout of voters with disabilities to grow their participation in the political process.

## Resources

- [Letter to Lake County Clerk](#) (September 18, 2020)
- Video: "[Voting with a Disability in Oregon](#)"
- DRO's [Oregon Easy Voting Guide](#)

## About Disability Rights Oregon

Disability Rights Oregon upholds the civil rights of people with disabilities to live, work, and engage in the community. The nonprofit works to transform systems, policies, and practices to give more people the opportunity to reach their full potential. For more than 40 years, the organization has served as Oregon's Protection & Advocacy system.

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