Online Voter Registration and Accessibility for People with Disabilities

Online voter registration presents a significant opportunity for Ohio legislators to expand access to our election system and encourage more people to exercise their right to vote. It will also save taxpayer dollars and make elections more efficient for officials. To maximize participation, an online voter registration system must be accessible for all voters, particularly people with disabilities.

Why is it important to make online voter registration accessible to people with disabilities?

- **It's the law.** The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that communications tools like websites and videos be accessible to all people with disabilities.[1]
- **Voters with disabilities need convenient online options.** Imagine having a mobility impairment that makes it difficult to leave your home. Or imagine being deaf or blind, which may pose challenges when communicating with others. Registering to vote could be as simple as a click of a mouse.
- **Over 1.6 million Ohioans have a disability.** Accounting for 15% of the population, this is a significant portion of our state's electorate, and the Government has a legal and moral obligation to ensure their voices are heard.[2]
- **Improving access for people with disabilities often improves the website overall.** All users will benefit from simpler web designs, making the website more user friendly.

How can online voter registration systems be more accessible to people with disabilities?

- **Require website accessibility in proposed legislation.** While federal law already requires it, including this provision in state law leaves no question of its importance and offers an opportunity to include broader protections.
- **Contract with a website accessibility vendor.** Websites need to be tested extensively and built with trusted designs to ensure accessibility.
- **Allow a range of identification.** People with disabilities may not need a driver's license or may face challenges getting to a DMV. Currently, Ohio voters use many types of ID to register by paper or in person—they should be able to do so online too.
- **Ensure there is adequate time to make online voter registration accessible.** If implementation of online voter registration is rushed, voters with disabilities are more likely to face problems with website designs. Legislators should build in plenty of time for election officials to create and test accessible websites.
- **Include people with disabilities in the conversation.** Ohioans with disabilities can be an important resource in ensuring universal design and access for everyone.

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[1] 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a)(1); 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(b)(1).
[2] The Center for Personal Assistance Services, Web Accessibility Guidelines (June 2013) available at http://www.pascenter.org/state_based_stats/disability_stats/acs_prevalence.php?state=ohio