



IS MY POLLING PLACE ACCESSIBLE?

A VOTER'S TOOLKIT FOR POLLING PLACE ACCESSIBILITY

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Every voter deserves equal, independent access to the polls. Polling places in Michigan are required by law to be physically accessible and to provide accessible voting equipment, but the reality on Election Day often falls short of what the law requires.

Early voting and Election Day audits conducted by Detroit Disability Power have found significant barriers to voting for disabled people at polling places across the state. Our trained observers have documented accessibility issues from blocked entrances and malfunctioning accessible voting equipment to barriers that go unaddressed election after election. These issues have been shared directly to local clerks and state election officials. That documentation has helped hold officials accountable, informed advocacy for stronger enforcement of existing law, and built a growing record of what disabled voters actually encounter.

However, you don't need to be an expert to notice when something isn't right and make a real difference.

This toolkit gives you everything you need to evaluate the accessibility of your polling place and to take action on what you find. It is organized into three sections. Sections one and two are designed to be printed and brought with you on Election Day or during early voting so you can record your observations in real time.

SECTION 1: Polling Place Accessibility Checklist — A simple yes/no checklist covering parking, entrances, the path through the building, and accessible voting equipment. Space is provided for notes on each section.

SECTION 2: What to Look For — A question-by-question reference guide that explains what to look for when answering each checklist item. Illustrations are included for key accessibility features.

SECTION 3: Talking to Your Clerk About What You Found — Guidance on how to share your observations with your local election clerk, including a sample email, what to realistically expect, and how to escalate if needed. Use this section after your visit to turn your observations into action.

Learn more about DDP's poll audit work at DetroitDisabilityPower.org/PollAudits.

Polling Place Accessibility Checklist

A Tool for Recording Your Polling Place Observations

Polling Place Name	Date & Time of Visit
Address	Municipality (City or Township and County)

PARKING & ARRIVAL

1. Are there clearly marked accessible parking spots?
Look for blue lines, access aisle, and wheelchair symbol on signage or in the spots. ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Is there a sign visible from the street or parking area explaining how to request curbside voting?
Voters who cannot enter the building have the right to vote from their vehicle. ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Is the path from parking to the building entrance paved and free of obstacles?
Check for curb cuts, no steps, no narrow passages or uneven surfaces. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Notes on your "Parking & Arrival" observations:

ENTRANCE

4. Is there a wheelchair-accessible entrance, and was it clearly marked?
It may be the main entrance or a separate door. Look for the international accessibility symbol (wheelchair icon). ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Is the accessible entrance unlocked and open?
A locked accessible entrance is a barrier — voters cannot wait for staff to unlock it. ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. Are the entrance doors easy to open independently?
Doors should have a push-button opener, be automatic, have a handle that does not require grasping or twisting, and/or be light enough to open with one hand. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Notes on your "Entrance" observations:

INSIDE THE POLLING PLACE

7. Is the path through the building clear of stairs, narrow doorways, or other obstacles? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Look for enough width for a wheelchair and no items blocking the aisle.

8. Is there a wheelchair-height voting booth available and ready to use? ☐ Yes ☐ No

This is a lower booth so that someone in a wheelchair or seated can mark their paper ballot independently.

9. Is the wheelchair-height voting booth positioned so a voter could mark their ballot privately? ☐ Yes ☐ No

The booth should not face a high-traffic area or allow others to see the ballot.

10. Is there a Voter Assist Terminal (VAT) set up and available to use? ☐ Yes ☐ No

The VAT is an accessible voting machine with multiple accessibility features. It should be powered on and at wheelchair height. It should be far enough from walls and other barriers for wheelchair users to position themselves to utilize the device.

11. Is the VAT positioned so the voter could use it privately? ☐ Yes ☐ No

The screen should not be visible to others nearby.

Notes on your "Inside the Polling Place" observations:

Additional observations:

What to do with this checklist

Whether everything looked great or you spotted problems, your observations have value and you are encouraged to share them.

Contact your clerk. Your local election clerk is responsible for the accessibility of your polling place. Let them know what you saw. Positive observations are just as useful as concerns, and a pattern of positive reports helps clerks make the case for maintaining what's working.

Share with Detroit Disability Power. DDP tracks accessibility conditions across Michigan polling places. You are welcome to email your completed checklist to elections@detroitdisabilitypower.org.

What to Look For

A Question-by-Question Reference Guide to Polling Place Accessibility

This guide explains what to look for when answering each question on the Polling Place Accessibility Checklist. Use it to help you evaluate what you see at your polling place.

PARKING & ARRIVAL

Checklist Question 1: *Are there clearly marked accessible parking spots?*

- A marked parking space with blue lines
- Signage designating the space as accessible:
 - An accessibility symbol (wheelchair icon) on a sign at the end of the space, and/or painted at the foot of the space
- An access aisle next to the space (required in parking lots; not applicable for street parking)
- The access aisle must be clear of obstructions — no cones, vehicles, or equipment

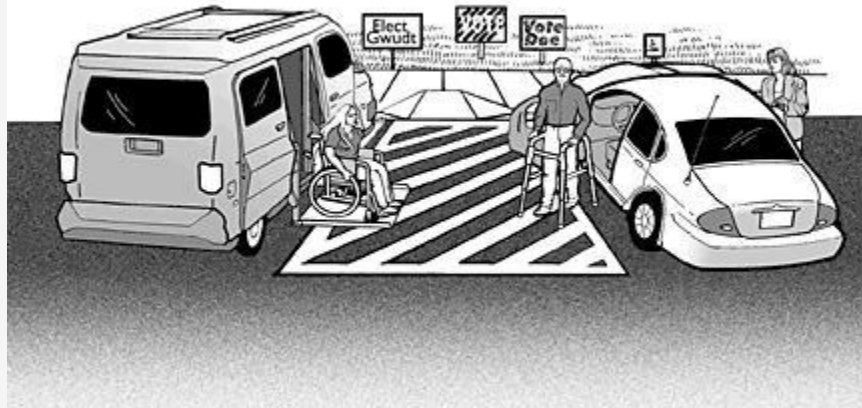


Figure 1: Accessible Parking Space in a Parking Lot

Checklist Question 2: *Is there a sign visible from the street or parking area explaining how to request curbside voting?*

- Look for a sign that is visible before you enter the building
- The sign should explain that curbside voting is available and how to request it (e.g., honk horn, call a number)
- A sign that has fallen over or is blocked by another object does not count

Checklist Question 3: *Is the path from parking to the building entrance paved and free of obstacles?*

- Are there curb cuts where the sidewalk meets the road or parking lot?
- Are there ramps for any stairs? Even one small step prevents access for many wheelchair users.
 - If a ramp is excessively steep or in disrepair, it is not providing real access.
- Are there protruding objects like wall-mounted signs or low-hanging branches?
 - Objects with their bottom edge more than 27 inches off the ground are a hazard — a white cane user cannot detect them.
- Is the surface smooth and stable? (No gravel, grass, or broken pavement on the accessible route)

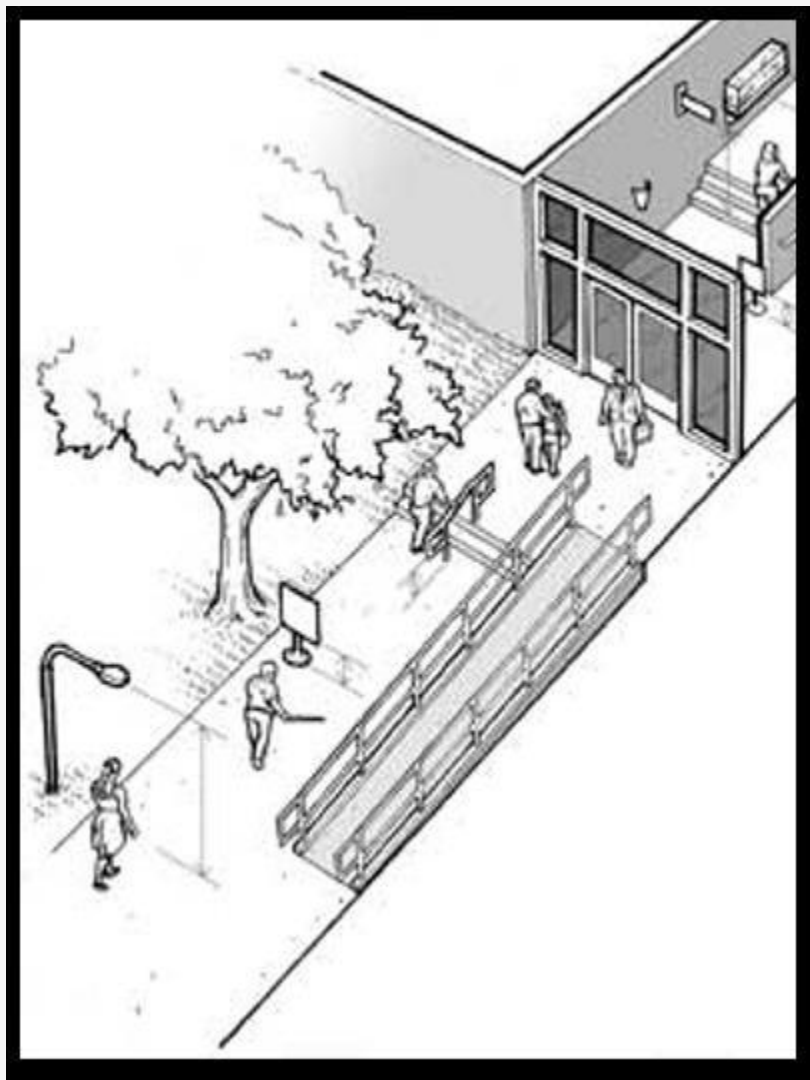


Figure 2: Accessible Pathway to Building

ENTRANCE

Checklist Question 4: *Is there a wheelchair-accessible entrance, and was it clearly marked?*

- The accessible entrance may be the main entrance used by all voters, or a separate door
- If it is the main entrance: it should be clearly marked as the polling place entrance, but it does not need to specifically say “accessible”
- If it is a separate entrance: it must have “accessible” signage or display the international accessibility symbol (wheelchair icon)
- Separate accessible entrances may be around the corner or on a different side of the building — walk the perimeter if needed. It may be helpful to note if the separate entrance is a significant distance from the main entrance or the polling location within the building as this can cause an additional barrier to voters using mobility devices.



Figure 3: Examples of Accessible Entrance Signage

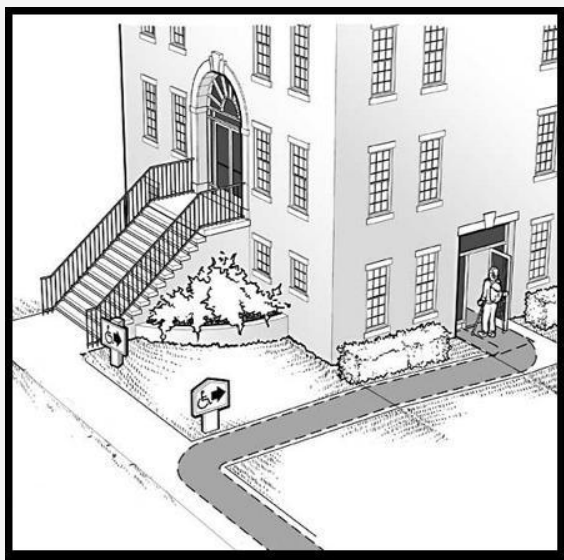


Figure 4: Example of a Separate Accessible Entrance

Checklist Question 5: *Is the accessible entrance unlocked and open?*

- Check the accessible door specifically — at buildings with multiple doors at an entrance, the accessible door (with push button) may be locked even if others are open
- If the polling place has a separate accessible entrance around the side or back, check that it is also unlocked
- Voters should not have to knock, ring a bell, or ask staff to unlock the door

Checklist Question 6: *Are the entrance doors easy to open independently?*

- Best: Door has a working push-button opener, or is automatic (motion sensor or pressure pad)
- Acceptable: Door is light enough to open with one hand
- Problem: Door is heavy, requires two hands, or there is no button
- Problem: Door is propped open by an object that blocks the opening (e.g., a chair, trash can, or something else that creates a barrier to access)
- If a push button is present but not working, that is a problem — note it in your observations

INSIDE THE POLLING PLACE

Checklist Question 7: *Is the path through the building clear of stairs, narrow doorways, or other obstacles?*

- Doorways must be at least 32 inches wide to accommodate a wheelchair
- If there are stairs on the interior path, there must be a ramp, elevator, or lift — even one small step prevents access
- Test any elevator or lift to make sure it is actually working — a broken elevator does not provide access
- Protruding objects (e.g., wall-mounted signs or displays) with their bottom edge above 27 inches are a hazard for people using a white cane
- Look for items like stacked chairs, tables, or equipment blocking accessible routes

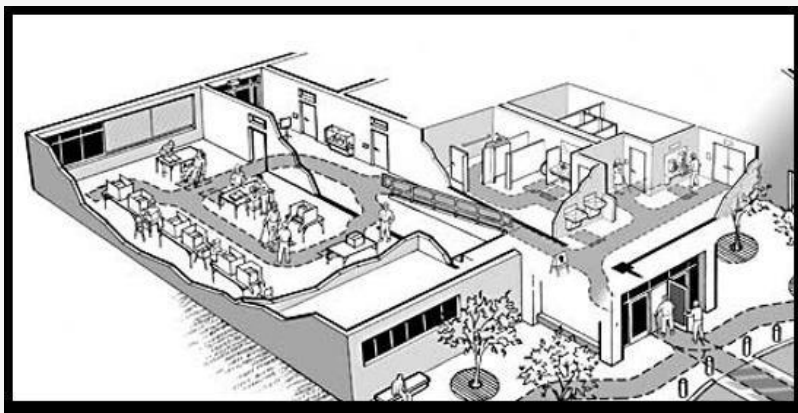


Figure 5: Path of Travel in the Polling Place



Figure 6: Example of a Protruding Object Sensed with a White Cane

Checklist Question 8: *Is there a wheelchair-height voting booth available and ready to use?*

- A wheelchair-height booth is a lower surface that allows a seated voter to mark their paper ballot independently
- It must be its own distinct voting booth — it may be near the Voter Assist Terminal (VAT), but it is separate from it
- The booth must be set up and ready to use as a voting booth, not repurposed as a desk or storage
- Voters should not have to ask staff to clear the booth or wait for it to be set up
- The path to the booth should be clear of large objects, narrow passages, or unsecured cords
- There should be enough space for a wheelchair user to pull up and position themselves to utilize the booth

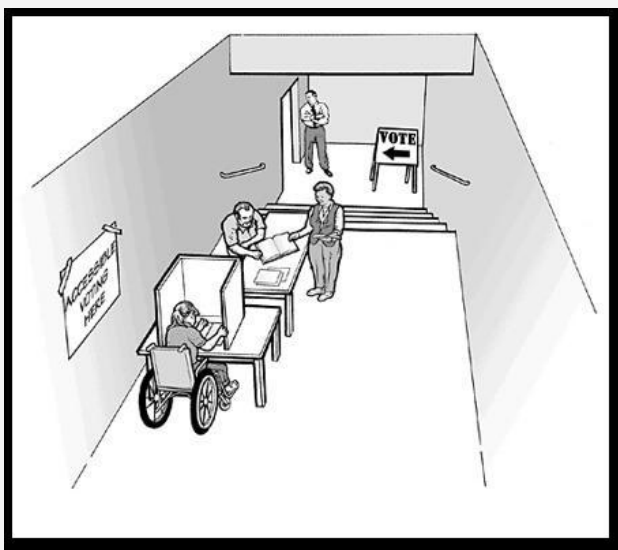


Figure 7: Example of a Wheelchair-Height Voting Booth

Checklist Question 9: *Is the wheelchair-height voting booth positioned so a voter could mark their ballot privately?*

- Is the booth positioned so that others nearby — including voters in other booths or staff — could see the ballot being marked?
- Is there a secrecy shield or divider if the booth is in a high-traffic area or near other booths?
- Every voter has the right to a secret ballot, regardless of the equipment they use

Checklist Question 10: *Is there a Voter Assist Terminal (VAT) set up and available to use?*

- The VAT is an accessible electronic voting machine that allows voters with disabilities to cast a ballot independently without hand-marking a paper ballot
- To be considered available, the VAT must be: physically set up, at wheelchair height, and powered on
- The accessible controller (a device with large buttons for voters with limited hand mobility) must be plugged in and within reach
- Headphones must be plugged in and ready to use — headphones present but not plugged in do not count
 - Election workers cannot simply offer to plug in headphones upon request — they must be ready at all times
- The path from the check-in table to the VAT should be clear and navigable
- There should be enough space for a wheelchair user to position themselves in front of the screen



Figure 8: Accessible Voting Systems, known as the Voter Assist Terminal (VAT) in Michigan. Specific equipment is selected at the county level. A list of voting equipment by county can be found at <https://mVIC.sos.state.mi.us/VotingMachineVendor/Index>. From Left: Liberty Vote ImageCast ICX, Hart Verity Touch Writer, ES&S ExpressVote

Checklist Question 11: *Is the VAT positioned so the voter could use it privately?*

- Is the VAT screen facing a direction where others could see it?
- Is the VAT in a location where other voters or staff are required to walk behind the user?
- If positioned near other booths or high-traffic areas, are there secrecy shields or other privacy measures in place?
- For audio output: headphones protect the voter's secrecy, but the polling place should be set up so that voters feel comfortable using them

Talking to Your Clerk About What You Found

Turning your observations into action

Who is your clerk?

Your local election clerk is the official responsible for running elections in your city, township, or village; including choosing and setting up polling places. They have the authority to make accessibility improvements and are required by law to provide accessible voting.

You can find your clerk's contact information at Michigan.gov/Vote or by searching "[your city/township name] clerk."

Before you reach out:

- **Document everything.** Your completed checklist is your strongest tool. If you observe problems, note them as specifically as possible, including what the specific issue you encountered, where the issue was located, and how it affected access.
- **Take photos.** Photos make your report much harder to dismiss. Photograph any barriers (blocked ramps, missing signage, locked doors, etc.) you find outside of the polling location. Michigan law prohibits photography inside polling locations so you can only document issues inside a polling place in writing.
- **Know the law.** Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), along with Michigan law, polling places must be physically accessible and must provide accessible voting equipment, including the Voter Assist Terminal.

How to contact your clerk

Email is best — it creates a written record. You can call first to establish a relationship, but always follow up in writing.

What to expect

- **Clerks may be receptive.** Many clerks genuinely want to improve accessibility and simply don't have a full picture of what voters experience on Election Day. Your specific, documented observations can be genuinely helpful.
- **You may not get an immediate fix.** Some improvements (like ramp construction) take time and budget. Ask the clerk to confirm they have received your report and to share what steps they plan to take.
- **Follow up before the next election.** Contact the clerk again about 30 days before the next election to ask what changes have been made and whether the concerns you raised have been addressed.
- **Escalate if needed.** If the clerk is unresponsive or dismissive, you can file a complaint with the Michigan Bureau of Elections Ombudsperson for Accessible Elections (MDOS-ADAVoting@Michigan.gov or 517-335-2730). You can also share your findings with Detroit Disability Power.

Sample email:

Subject: Accessibility Concerns at [Polling Place Name] — [Election Date]

Dear [Clerk Name],

My name is [Your Name], and I am a voter in [City/Township]. I voted at [Polling Place Name] on [Date] and wanted to share some accessibility concerns I observed.

[Describe what you saw, using your checklist. Be specific and factual. For example: "The accessible entrance on the north side of the building was unmarked, there was no accessibility symbol or signage directing voters to it." Or: "The Voter Assist Terminal was present but appeared to be powered off for most of my visit."]

I am sharing this because I believe every voter deserves equal access to the polls, and I want to work with your office to address these issues before the next election. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss what improvements are possible. Please feel free to contact me at [your email or phone].

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

[Your Name]

Requesting a meeting

If you don't receive a response to your email within two weeks, or if the clerk's reply is vague about what steps they plan to take, consider requesting an in-person meeting. A meeting gives you the opportunity to walk through your observations in detail and to hear directly from the clerk about what changes are feasible and on what timeline.

When requesting a meeting, you can add a line to your follow-up email such as:

"I'd welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss these concerns. I'm flexible on timing and happy to work around your schedule. Would you be available for a 30-minute meeting in the coming weeks?"

How to prepare for your meeting

- **Bring your completed checklist.** This is your primary evidence. If you have photos, bring those too.
- **Know your ask.** Before the meeting, decide what specific outcomes you want. Vague requests are easier to dismiss. For example: "I'd like a commitment to unlock the accessible entrance before polls open" is more actionable than "I'd like things to be more accessible."
- **Research what's required.** Familiarize yourself with the basics of what the law requires (see the "Before you reach out" section of this guide). You don't need to be a lawyer, but knowing that a Voter Assist Terminal is legally required, not optional, strengthens your position.
- **Consider bringing someone with you.** A second person can take notes, provide support, and signal that more than one voter is paying attention.
- **Write down your questions in advance.** It's easy to forget things in the moment. A short list keeps you on track.

Sample meeting agenda

You don't need to share this with the clerk in advance, but having a structure in mind will help the meeting stay focused.

Opening (2–3 minutes)

Introduce yourself, thank the clerk for their time, and briefly explain why you requested the meeting — you visited your polling place, recorded your observations, and want to discuss what you found.

Share your observations (10 minutes)

Walk through your checklist section by section. Describe what you observed factually and specifically. Show photos if you have them. Ask the clerk if they were aware of the issues you identified.

Discuss solutions (10 minutes)

Ask the clerk what options exist for addressing each issue. Some fixes are simple and immediate (repositioning equipment, unlocking a door earlier). Others take more time or coordination with a building owner. Ask who is responsible for each item and what the timeline looks like.

Next steps (5 minutes)

Before you leave, confirm: What specific actions will be taken? By when? How will you know they've been completed? Ask if you can follow up by email to confirm what was discussed.

Closing

Thank the clerk for their time. Let them know you plan to follow up before the next election to check on progress.

After the meeting

Send a brief follow-up email within 24 hours summarizing what was discussed and any commitments made. This creates a written record and signals that you are engaged and will follow up. Keep it factual and collegial, the goal is to establish an ongoing working relationship, not to put the clerk on the defensive.



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