



Evaluating Federal Grant Programs to Improve Voting Accessibility

August 2026

This report represents a study of election administration issues pursuant to the Help America Vote Act, 52 U.S.C. § 20981. As such, a vote of the Commission is required to adopt this report as final, 52 U.S.C. § 20928. In the absence of Commissioners to take a formal vote, the EAC is making this draft report available for public inspection.

Commissioners may vote to adopt the report as final once appointed.

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This report is an official publication of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), based on research and analysis conducted by Grace Klinefelter of the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) under contract with the EAC.



Executive Summary

Over the last two decades, the **Help America Vote Act (HAVA)** has served as a foundational advancement at the federal level in expanding opportunities for Americans with disabilities to participate fully and independently in elections. Prior to HAVA's enactment in 2002, many voting locations were physically inaccessible and critical voter information was not available in accessible formats. HAVA responded to the inaccessibility of elections by establishing two key grant programs:

- ✓ **Section 261** grants to state election offices, distributed from 2003 to 2011, provided \$103.8 million to help states make voting locations accessible to voters with disabilities, inform voters about accessible voting options, and train poll workers and local election officials on improving voting accessibility.
- ✓ **Section 291** grants to protection and advocacy organizations (P&As), which are ongoing, have provided \$138.5 million for P&As to engage with voters with disabilities, train election officials, monitor accessibility, assist voters, and educate policymakers on systemic improvements.

Since HAVA's passage, states have improved voting location accessibility, expanded poll worker training, produced accessible voter education materials, and developed new procedures to ensure privacy and independence for voters with disabilities. P&As serve as on-the-ground accessibility monitors; educate election officials, voters, policymakers, and other organizations; and work with stakeholders to improve voting accessibility in every state and territory.

Both grant programs have improved voting accessibility for Americans with disabilities, HAVA's accessibility provisions have been instrumental in ensuring millions of Americans with disabilities can access all aspects of the voting process.

However, while voting accessibility has improved markedly since HAVA's enactment, barriers to full accessibility remain. Americans with disabilities vote at lower rates than people without disabilities, and they frequently encounter obstacles to voting, including difficulty accessing voting locations, filling out and submitting mail ballots, and communicating with poll workers.¹ Continued federal support for accessibility efforts is critical to ensuring that every voter can cast a private, independent, and secure ballot.

¹ In 2022, voters with disabilities were [more than three times as likely](#) than non-disabled voters to report some type of voting difficulty (either at a polling place or using a mail ballot).



Introduction

More than [70 million](#) American adults (28.7% of the adult population) report having a disability that affects their daily lives. Of those Americans who do not have a disability, many will acquire one as they age.²

Americans with disabilities frequently encounter barriers that make voting more challenging than for nondisabled Americans, and voters with visual and cognitive impairments are most likely to [report difficulties voting](#). These barriers [include challenges](#) accessing voting locations and voting by mail, including difficulties getting inside voting locations, waiting in line, reading and filling out ballots, using voting equipment, communicating with poll workers, and returning mail ballots. In 2022, voters with disabilities were [three times as likely](#) as nondisabled voters to report difficulty voting.

Other research corroborates voters' experiences of barriers at voting locations: In 2016, a [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\) survey](#) of 167 voting locations found that 83% had at least one potential impediment to full accessibility.³

Due in part to these barriers, voter turnout among people with disabilities [is consistently lower](#) than that of their nondisabled peers. This difference is known as the disability turnout gap. Between [1992 and 1998](#), the gap ranged from 14-21 percentage points.⁴

Policy makers, voters, and advocates have made progress in improving voting access for people with disabilities in recent decades. Recognizing the need for systemic improvements, Congress enacted the **Help America Vote Act (HAVA)** in 2002. Among its many reforms in election administration, HAVA addressed voting accessibility by creating two federal grant programs:

- ✓ **Section 261** grants to state election offices, distributed from 2003 to 2011, provided \$103.8 million to help states make voting locations accessible to voters with disabilities, inform voters about accessible voting options, and train poll workers and local election officials on improving voting accessibility.
- ✓ **Section 291** grants to protection and advocacy organizations (P&As), which are ongoing and have provided \$138.5 million for P&As to engage with voters with disabilities, train election officials, monitor accessibility, assist voters, and educate policymakers on systemic improvements.

Section 261 grants were available to states through their secretaries of state or chief election officials until 2011. Election offices used the funds to improve the physical accessibility of voting locations, bolster voting privacy and independence for voters with disabilities, train poll workers, and educate voters.

Section 291 funds are still distributed to P&As that educate individuals on voter registration and their legal voting rights, provide voter registration opportunities, and help individuals access voting locations on Election Day.

² [43.9% of adults](#) age 65 or over have at least one disability.

³ Because the GAO selected a nongeneralizable sample for its survey, the results should not be used to generalize about polling place accessibility nationwide in 2016.

⁴ The disability turnout gap estimates for [1992 to 1998](#) are much less robust than those for the [2012 to 2022](#) period. The more recent data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement, which only began asking a disability-related question in 2008. The older data comes from a range of sources including the National Election Studies and Current Population Survey.



In the two decades since HAVA's passage and the enactment of the grant programs, voting accessibility appears to have improved: Between 2012 and 2022, the [disability turnout gap](#) ranged from 4.6 to 11.3 percentage points, a marked decrease from pre-HAVA levels.⁵

This report assesses the Section 261 and Section 291 grant programs over the last 23 years. It examines how states and P&As have used the funds and how HAVA's grant programs have contributed to improvements in voting accessibility nationwide. While significant progress has been made, this report also documents the accessibility challenges that remain. It underscores the critical importance of federal funding in ensuring that every American can vote privately, independently, and securely.

This report focuses on the impact of federal funding for local election administration, specifically through HAVA authorized Accessibility Grants. It does not examine the ability for state and local entities to independently fund elections or the efficacy of state and local funding.

⁵ The disability turnout gap was 11.3 percentage points in 2020 and 4.6 percentage points in 2022; all turnout gap data between 2012 and 2022 falls within that range. The disability turnout gap is consistently smaller in midterm elections.



How Has Congress Improved Voting Accessibility?

Congress has passed several bills in the past 60 years aimed at improving voting accessibility for Americans with disabilities.

The Voting Rights Act

The [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#) permits voters with disabilities to receive assistance from someone the voter chooses. It was the [first major law](#) to address access for voters with disabilities. The Voting Rights Act also prohibits testing and educational attainment requirements for voting.

The Protection and Advocacy System

Congress established the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) system in the 1975 [Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act](#) following revelations about the [abuse and neglect](#) that people with developmental disabilities experienced in state institutions. This act was most recently reauthorized in 2020.

The act created the system of nonprofit organizations dedicated to ensuring the well-being of Americans with disabilities. Today, there are [57 P&As](#) — one in each state, territory, and the District of Columbia, and one serving the Native American population.

P&As engage in a range of activities to support Americans with disabilities, including providing legal representation, assisting in access to benefits, removing barriers to employment, investigating abuse and neglect, procuring and maintaining assistive technology, improving participation in the voting process, and advocating for the rights of people with disabilities.

The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act

The [Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act](#), which Congress passed in 1984, seeks to improve voters' with disabilities and elderly voters' access to voting locations and voter registration. It [requires that voters](#) with disabilities have access to large-print and auditory instructions in voting locations and [establishes a private cause of action](#) against state and local governments for voters to seek relief when their voting rights are violated.

The Americans with Disabilities Act

Congress passed the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) in 1990. This landmark law protects Americans with disabilities from discrimination and directs state and local governments to [ensure that people with disabilities have full voting rights](#). The ADA requires that voter registration, voting locations, voting equipment, and voter communications are accessible to Americans with disabilities. The ADA also requires that voting policies and procedures do not discriminate against voters with disabilities.

The National Voter Registration Act

The [National Voter Registration Act](#) of 1993 [requires that voter registration be accessible](#) and that government offices that serve people with disabilities provide voter registration forms and assistance.



The Help America Vote Act

Congress passed the [Help America Vote Act of 2002](#) to improve election administration after the 2000 presidential election. HAVA sets minimum federal standards for election administration, provides federal funding for elections, and includes several provisions intended to improve voting accessibility, including the 261 and 291 grants to state election offices and protection and advocacy organizations.

Between 2012 and 2020, voting difficulties among people with disabilities [declined significantly](#). In 2012, 26% of voters with disabilities reported difficulties, while in 2020 only 11% did. About [half of that decline](#) was due to the shift to mail voting during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic; many voters who had difficulties voting at voting locations were able to vote by mail instead. Accessibility improvements made at voting locations under HAVA and other laws was likely the [other factor behind the decline](#).⁶

⁶ “The decrease in voting difficulties from 2012 to 2020 is good news, though it should be noted that about half of the decrease in polling place difficulties appears due to a change in composition of voters, as those who were most likely to have difficulties at polling places shifted to using mail ballots in the 2020 pandemic. The other half of the decrease, however, appears due to improved polling place accessibility that represents progress by election officials and policy-makers. This interpretation is supported by the finding that among those who voted at a polling place both before and after the pandemic, those with disabilities were more likely than those without disabilities to say that voting in 2020 was easier than before the pandemic.”



Accessibility Grants to State Election Offices

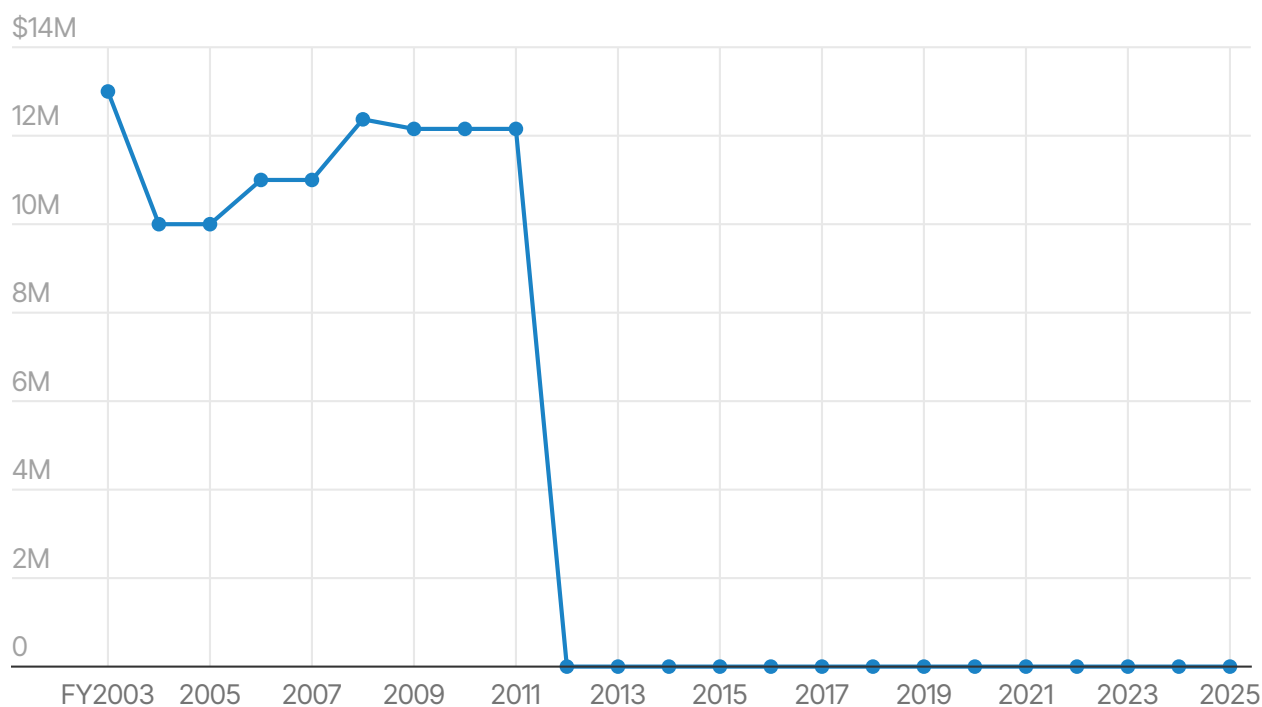
Section 261 of HAVA directed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to issue funding to states to improve voting accessibility. The law specified that the funding was to be used to make voting locations physically accessible to voters with disabilities and to provide information to these voters on the accessibility of voting locations (this included outreach programs and training poll workers). HHS distributed funds to state election offices from 2003 to 2011.

Congress appropriated between \$10 million to \$13 million for Section 261 in every fiscal year from 2003 to 2011 (Fig. 1). Funding levels remained relatively consistent over that period with modest growth between FY2004 and FY2008.

In total, Congress allocated \$103,832,000 to states under Section 261 between FY2003 to FY2011.

“...having those type of...Section 261 funds available would have an undeniably significant impact on improving accessibility for voters with disabilities...throughout the country. -Brad King, Former Co-Director, Indiana Election Division

Figure 1. Congress appropriated voting accessibility funds to state election offices until FY2011.



Source: Congressional appropriations bills.

Our data comes from Florida's, Massachusetts', and Wisconsin's grant reports to HHS; publicly available information from state election offices on the grants; and the [2003 to 2004](#) and [2009 to 2010](#) HHS reports to Congress on HAVA.



State election offices engaged in several types of activities to improve voting accessibility, which we divide into four categories:

1. Voting location accessibility
2. Privacy and independence in voting
3. Election official and poll worker training
4. Voter outreach and education

Voting Location Accessibility

State election offices surveyed voting locations around their states to ensure compliance with federal laws on voting accessibility. They also provided funds to local election offices to bring voting locations into compliance.

In [2003 and 2004](#), [Arizona](#) and [Arkansas](#) awarded grants to local election offices to purchase supplies to improve voting location accessibility, including ramps, accessible voting stations, handrails, signs, and magnifying sheets.

Florida reimbursed county election offices for voting-location renovations to make sites ADA-compliant, supplies to improve accessibility, and accessible voting systems, including ballot marking devices.⁷

[Indiana conducted](#) a statewide survey of people with disabilities and formed local advisory councils of voters with disabilities, elderly voters, and local election officials to determine the best way to improve voting location accessibility in its counties.

[Idaho awarded](#) grants to local election offices to ensure voting locations were accessible. Election offices used the funds to improve voting location parking, buy accessible voting stations, pay student greeters at voting locations, and distribute information to voters with disabilities through mailers, brochures, and videos.

Wisconsin created a voting location accessibility grant program in 2009. The state distributed \$92,255 in supplies and reimbursements to local election offices to improve accessibility in 527 voting locations.⁸

[Minnesota distributed](#) grants to local election offices to make physical improvements to voting locations, including installing automatic doors and accessible sidewalks, and purchased accessible voting supplies such as voting stations, privacy shields, and ballot magnifiers.

[Mississippi contracted](#) the Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities to survey voting locations statewide for ADA-compliance and compile the information into a centralized database.

In 2010, [Virginia partnered](#) with the state's Centers for Independent Living to audit the accessibility of voting locations; they audited 700 voting locations in 75 localities.

[Ohio implemented](#) Election Day accessibility spot checks, in which voting locations around the state were randomly selected and assessed for accessibility. In 2010, 180 voting locations were spot checked and found to be in compliance with state rules.

“When I was...in Florida I remember using HHS dollars which you could use as well as the Help America Vote Act grants for improving voting location, for example, for voting machines. And it really made a difference...I found it amazing when those funds were available.
-Former EAC Commissioner Donald Palmer”

⁷ Data from Florida's FY2013 HAVA Voting Access narrative report to HHS.

⁸ Data from Wisconsin's FY2009 HAVA Voting Access narrative report to HHS.



Privacy and Independence in Voting

One significant impact of HAVA was that states acquired voting systems that are accessible for voters with disabilities so that all voters could have private and independent voting experiences.

Some states used Section 261 funds to select or purchase accessible voting systems. For example, in 2003 and 2004, the [District of Columbia](#) purchased electronic voting systems that were accessible for voters with disabilities.

In 2005, Massachusetts held seven vendor fairs where local election officials, disability advocacy organizations, and the public could observe and use accessible voting equipment. The vendor fairs also organized focus groups with fair participants. When selecting its accessible voting system, the Secretary of State's office used feedback from the vendor fairs to formulate its request for input. The AutoMARK Voter Assist Terminal was selected and distributed to all Massachusetts municipalities.⁹

In 2009 and 2010, [Maine used](#) Section 261 funds to pay for maintenance of accessible voting systems. The grants provided local election offices with new equipment and pocket guides on how to use the voting system; the money also enabled officials to create an accessibility focused chapter in the election official training manual.

Election Official and Poll Worker Training

Section 261 identifies the training of poll workers and local election officials on voting accessibility as a requirement for state election offices. States trained both groups, ensuring poll workers knew how to operate newly acquired accessible voting systems.

[Georgia developed](#) a statewide poll worker training guide featuring guidelines for interacting with and assisting voters with disabilities. [Hawaii worked](#) with its Disability and Communication Access Board to train state and local election officials on assisting voters with disabilities and using the state's accessible direct recording electronic (DRE) voting system. In 2004, [Minnesota worked](#) with the American Council of the Blind and the Minnesota Council on Disabilities to develop a training video for poll workers, which included assisting voters with disabilities. Florida election offices contracted with the Centers for Independent Living to train poll workers on working with voters with disabilities.¹⁰

Voter Outreach and Education

HAVA Section 261 specified that state election offices should conduct outreach to individuals with disabilities to inform them of the accessibility of voting locations. State and local election officials already conduct substantial voter outreach, allowing states to add accessibility information to supplement those existing efforts.

Massachusetts produced an audio version of its "Information for Voters" booklet, which it sends to every household in Massachusetts. The state added information on accessibility to the booklet, and the secretary's office collaborated with local election officials and disability-focused organizations to produce the materials.¹¹

[Texas contracted](#) with the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities to create a workshop on voting accessibility for its State Independent Living Council's annual conference. Wisconsin worked with the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition to produce educational materials for voters with disabilities, including an informational packet for residents of care facilities and nursing homes who were unfamiliar with the rules around registering to vote and casting a ballot.¹²

⁹ Data from Massachusetts' FY2005 HAVA Voting Access narrative report to HHS.

¹⁰ Data from Florida's FY2014 HAVA Voting Access narrative report to HHS.

¹¹ Data from Massachusetts' FY2015 HAVA Voting Access narrative report to HHS.

¹² Data from Wisconsin's FY2015 HAVA Voting Access narrative report to HHS.



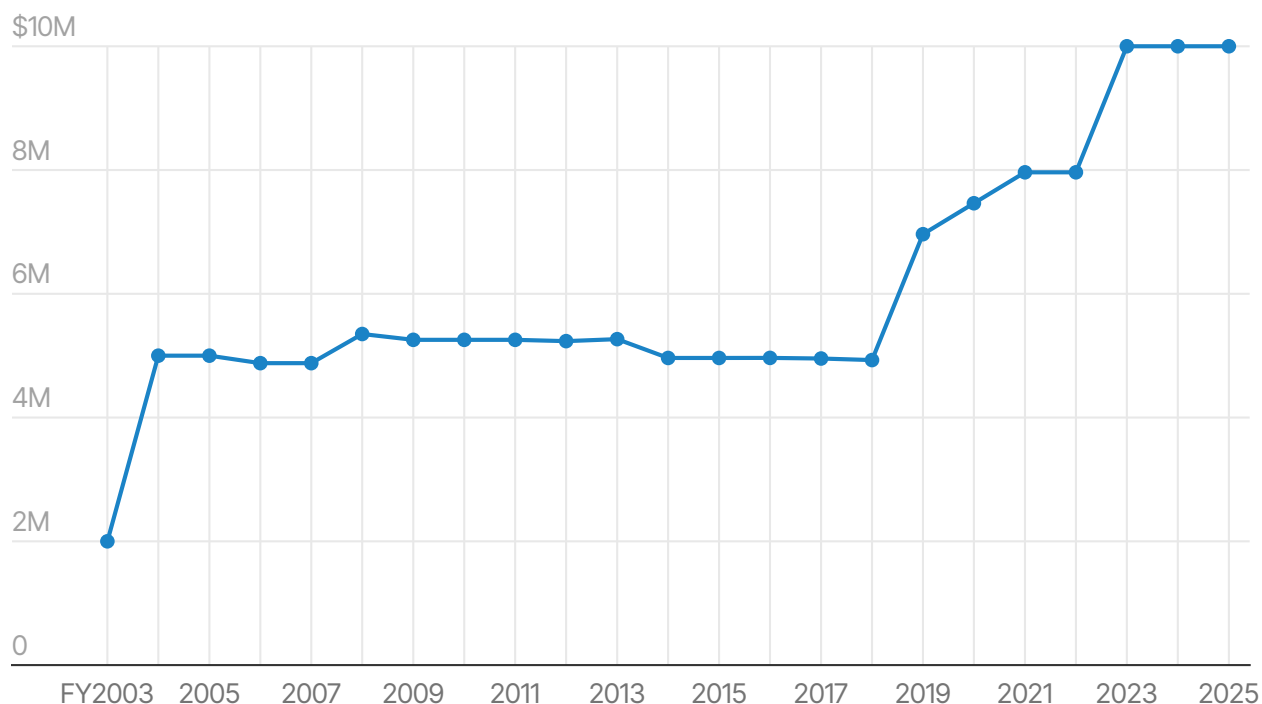
Accessibility Grants to P&As

Section 291 of HAVA created a new P&A grant program, Protection and Advocacy for Voting Accessibility (PAVA), “to ensure full participation in the electoral process for individuals with disabilities, including registering to vote, casting a vote and accessing polling places.” Section 291 directs the Administration for Community Living (ACL), a subagency within HHS, to issue the grant payments.

Congress has appropriated between \$2 million and \$10 million for the PAVA program every fiscal year since 2003 (Fig. 2). The funding levels have increased modestly over the last two decades, with the largest increases coming in fiscal years 2004, 2019, and 2023; PAVA received \$10 million in FY2023, FY2024, and FY2025.

“We have a HAVA grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and under that grant, we provide a number of services to the protection advocacy voting advocates, to election officials, to election technology developers, related to accessibility of the election process. -Lou Ann Blake, National Federation of the Blind”

Figure 2. Federal voting accessibility grants to P&As have increased since FY2003.

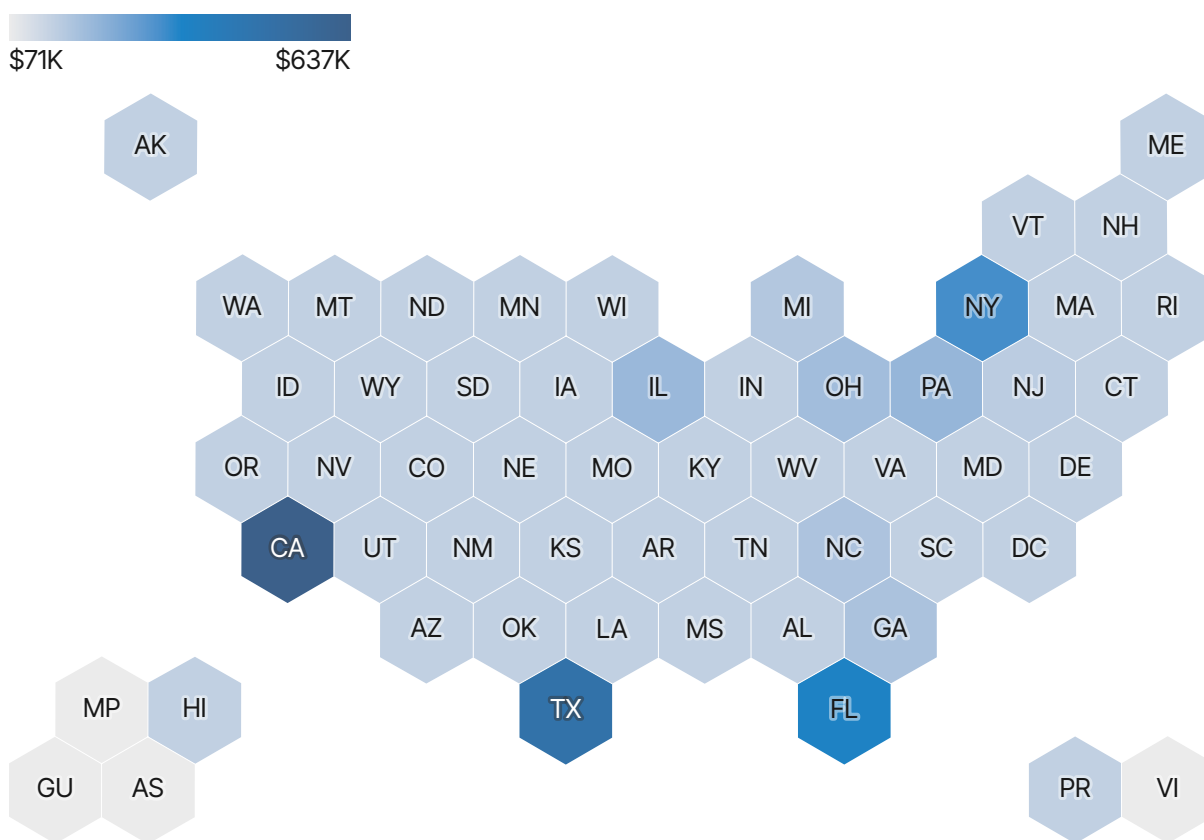


Source: Congressional appropriations bills (FY2003 through FY2011, FY2025), Administration for Community Living’s annual presidential budget justifications (FY2012 through FY2024).

Protection and advocacy organizations receive funds from the PAVA program annually; funding levels are based on states' populations and are calculated [using the same formula](#) as other P&A grant programs. In FY2024 (the most recent year for which ACL has published state-level data), most P&As received \$141,043 (Fig. 3). P&As in the 12 most populous states (California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia) received more funds, with California receiving the most at \$637,203. American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Native American P&A received \$70,521 each. Puerto Rico, by far the most populous territory, received \$141,043, the same as most states.

Figure 3. Federal voting accessibility funds received by P&As in FY2024.

Because PAVA is a formula grant, P&As in more populous states received more Section 291 grant funding in FY2024.



Not pictured: Native American Protection and Advocacy Inc. received \$70,521.

Source: Administration for Community Living Map Data: Telegrams/NPR

The P&As use HAVA Section 291 funds for a variety of activities to improve voting accessibility and support Americans with disabilities in voting. The P&As report these activities to the Administration for Community Living every year in their grant performance reports. This data comes from the P&As' annual grant performance reports for FY2020-FY2024, and we break the P&As' activities into 10 categories.¹³

¹³ These categories are not mutually exclusive; P&As often reported engaging in several different kinds of activity (for instance, collaborating with other nonprofit organizations to do voter outreach or train election officials).

P&As educated election officials and policymakers on ways to meet accessibility requirements and improve accessibility in voting laws, policies, and procedures.

1. Training and educating local election officials
2. Training and educating state election officials
3. Training and educating poll workers
4. Educating policymakers

P&As worked with individuals and support and advocacy organizations to ensure people with disabilities can vote.

5. Voter outreach and education
6. Collaborations with organizations
7. Individual assistance
8. Training and educating other organizations

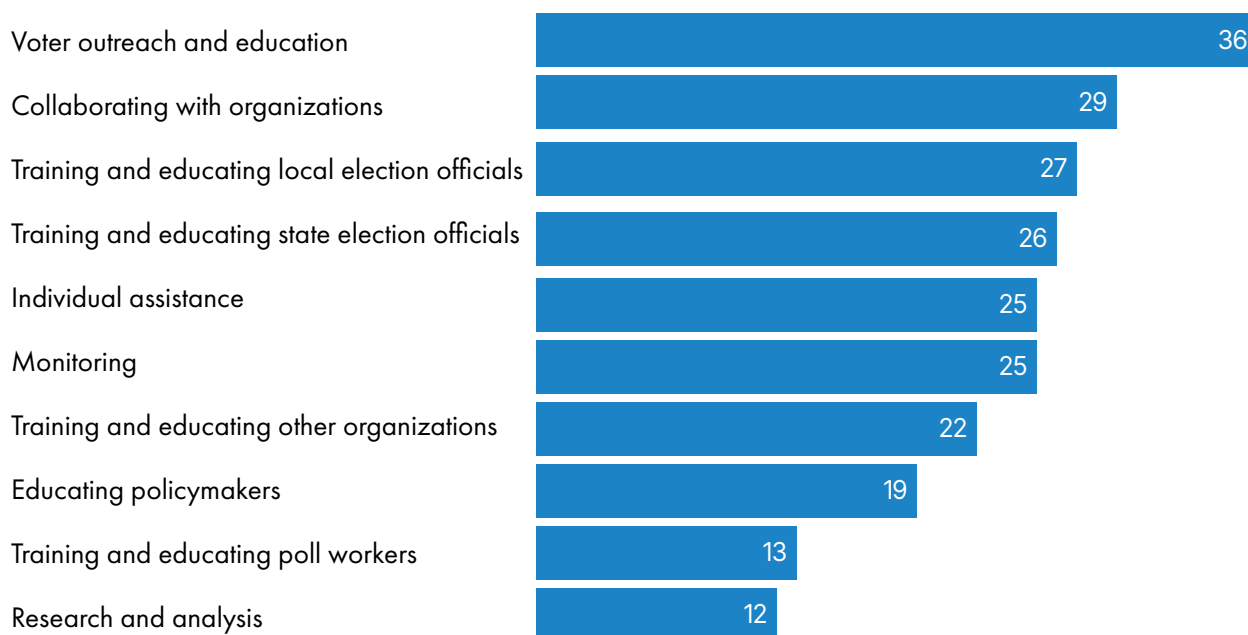
P&As assessed the state of voting accessibility and recommended areas for improvement.

9. Monitoring
10. Research and analysis

Below, we describe the activities P&As engage in within each category and how many P&As engaged in each type of activity between FY2020 and FY2024. Each section includes a case study on a particular P&A's work.

Figure 4. What do P&As do with federal voting accessibility funds?

P&As engaged in 10 types of activities between FY2020 and FY2024. Bars indicate the number of P&As that reported engaging in an activity at least once in that period.



There are 57 P&As, and we received reports submitted during the FY2020 and FY2024 period from 42 of them.

Source: P&A One PPR grant reports to ACL, obtained via public records request to ACL.



P&As educated election officials and policymakers on ways to meet accessibility requirements and improve accessibility in voting laws, policies, and procedures.

Training and Educating Local Election Officials

P&As provide training and education to local election officials (LEOs), and 27 reported doing so between FY2020 to FY2024. Some P&As work with state offices to train LEOs at conferences and in training programs, while others work with individual local offices.

The education and training that P&As provide to local election officials include assessing voting location accessibility and providing technical assistance to improve access; training LEOs on voting accessibility at conferences and in training programs; working with LEOs to resolve individual voters' issues; and advocating for voting accessibility.

When P&As encounter a voting accessibility issue — such as observing ADA violations at voting locations or hearing from a voter with a disability about a barrier — they can resolve the issue by educating LEOs on accessibility either at the voting location, after the election, or through the HAVA-complaint process. According to interviews with P&A staff, the organizations increasingly reach out to the local election office directly to educate election officials, when possible, instead of pursuing legal action. Building positive relationships between P&As and LEOs has improved this process; one organization reported that its collaborative, “let me help you” approach to working with LEOs has allowed them to accomplish more and ensure voters have necessary accommodations.

Case Study: Utah's County Clerk Training

Utah's P&A, the [Disability Law Center \(DLC\)](#), uses several strategies to educate local election officials. In 2022, DLC [examined 291 ballot boxes across Utah](#) and evaluated their accessibility for voters with disabilities. In FY2023, DLC used that survey for a training session at a conference held by the Utah Association of Counties. The DLC shared the survey's findings with 48 county clerks and election administrators and “provided suggestions for overcoming the most common access problems and offered technical support as counties make choices about electronic ballot delivery, voting accommodations including signature verification, and ballot box and vote center access,” according to its grant report.

The DLC also went to election offices throughout the state to train local election officials and their staff. The DLC provided information and technical assistance to nine newly elected county clerks and to new election staff in six counties in 2023. During the 2022 general election cycle, the DLC provided feedback to 11 counties about voting center accessibility and strategies to meet federal accessibility standards. In addition, it provided recommendations to the new clerk and election staff in Salt Lake County on improving access to ballot marking devices.

The DLC estimates that it trained 216 election administrators and poll workers in FY2023.



Training and Educating State Election Officials

Many P&As work with state election officials — secretaries of state and state election boards or commissions—to improve voting accessibility for people with disabilities. Twenty-six P&As reported training and educating state election officials between FY2020 and FY2024.

When protection and advocacy organizations observe access barriers at polling locations, many report their concerns to state election officials, who in turn work with the P&As and the local election office to address accessibility issues.

Some state election offices work proactively with their state P&As to address accessibility issues before elections. This effort includes training local election officials on ADA-compliance in voting locations, assistive technology like ballot marking devices, and the rights of voters with disabilities.

P&As sometimes provide technical assistance to state election offices, especially on ADA-compliant accessible voting practices and technologies. The Arizona Secretary of State's office, for example, solicited feedback from the state P&A, Disability Rights Arizona, on sections of the Arizona Elections Procedures Manual related to accommodating voters with disabilities. Massachusetts' P&A, the Disability Law Center, helped the state election office implement an accessible remote voting system during the 2022 primary election.

Case Study: Wisconsin Elections Commission's Accessibility Advisory Committee



Wisconsin's P&A, [Disability Rights Wisconsin](#), in its capacity as a member of the [Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition](#), serves on the Wisconsin Elections Commission's Accessibility Advisory Committee. The committee has produced materials for the state election office to train local election officials on voting location accessibility and developed guidance for nursing homes and group homes on assisting residents with voting.

Through the committee, Disability Rights Wisconsin also informs the state election office when voters with disabilities encounter accessibility issues while voting, such as a lack of accessible voting systems. The P&A receives information from voters who call its hotline and passes the information to the state office.

The Wisconsin Elections Commission won an [EAC Clearinghouse Award](#) for its role in creating the Accessibility Advisory Committee in 2020.

Training and Educating Poll Workers

Thirteen P&As provided training and education to poll workers between FY2020 and FY2024.

Most P&As monitor voting locations, and some educate poll workers within that setting. P&As observe accessibility barriers at polling locations and educate poll workers on how to correct them. The training and education that poll workers receive in this context is informal.

A few P&As also prepare training materials on ADA-compliance, voting accessibility, and engaging with voters with disabilities. The P&As share these materials — which can include videos, handbooks, comprehensive in-person courses and online modules — with state and local election officials who train poll workers.



Case Study: Rhode Island's Poll Worker Manual



The Rhode Island State Board of Elections maintains a [poll worker manual](#) that all poll workers in the state must review and bring to their assigned voting locations. [Disability Rights Rhode Island \(DRRI\)](#), the state's P&A, worked with the elections board in 2023 to update the poll worker manual's guidance on voting rights and accessibility for voters with disabilities. DRRI contributed to the chapter, "Voting Rights and Current Best Practices when Working with Voters with Disabilities."

Educating Policymakers

Nineteen P&As reported educating policymakers, including state legislators and governors, between FY2020 and FY2024. They provide expertise on voting accessibility when legislators draft language to reform elections- and disability-related laws and policies.

This education includes providing expert testimony to state legislatures, submitting public comments, tracking legislation, and sharing research. Some P&As participate in coalitions or task forces that recommend changes to legislation.

In many cases where P&As educate policymakers, their goal is to bring attention to how voting-related legislation would affect voters with disabilities. Legislators often do not have the subject matter expertise to fully understand how legislation might uniquely affect voters with disabilities, so P&As provide that expertise.

P&As also educate policymakers in executive departments — like state departments of transportation and divisions of motor vehicles (DMVs) — on how to improve accessibility so that voters with disabilities can get voter IDs and transportation to voting locations.

P&As do not do any lobbying under PAVA grant funds as the terms of the grant bar lobbying efforts.

Case Study: Absentee Voting Improvements for Blind North Dakotans



In 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people voted by mail because most voting locations in North Dakota closed. Some residents who were blind or had visual impairments were unable to cast mail ballots because they could not fill out their paper ballots independently. North Dakota's P&A, [Disability Rights North Dakota \(DRND\)](#), worked with the state legislature, the Secretary of State's office, the North Dakota Association of the Blind, and other disability-related groups to change the absentee voting process for these voters.

DRND first helped develop a system whereby eligible voters could schedule an appointment at their county election official's office to cast their ballots using its county's accessible voting systems. However, DRND determined that this solution did not help blind voters who lacked transportation.

DRND and its partners then worked with the legislature to change the absentee voting process in state law. The [bill passed](#) with broad bipartisan support. Voters who are blind, visually impaired, or print disabled can now cast a mail ballot using the same process as overseas members of the military: They mark the ballot electronically and upload it to a secure server, and the counties' absentee ballot election boards transfer the ballots to regular hand-marked paper ballots and count the votes with all other mail ballots.

P&As worked with individuals and support and advocacy organizations to ensure people with disabilities can vote.

Voter Outreach and Education

One of the P&As' most common activities is conducting outreach to voters with disabilities. Between FY2020 and FY2024, 36 P&As reported engaging in voter outreach and education. These activities included registration of eligible voters with disabilities and media campaigns.

P&As educate people with disabilities on their voting-related rights, including options for accessible voting (such as ballot marking devices and mail ballots), requirements for voting (such as voter ID), and voters' rights at the voting location (such as asking a poll worker for assistance casting a ballot). One P&A described its education work as ensuring that "people have the confidence to exercise" their right to vote.

Many P&As provide education in assisted living facilities, nursing homes, hospitals, jails, care facilities, and other locations where people with disabilities live. This training sometimes includes facility staff who play a role in ensuring that voters with disabilities can get to voting locations or mail their ballot.

Case Study: Hawaii's Voter Outreach Campaign

Hawaii's P&A, the [Hawaii Disability Rights Center](#), conducted voter outreach and education via media campaigns for the 2020 primary and general elections. Staff produced a video for social media, placed newspaper and radio ads, and appeared on local TV news and radio shows to highlight how the P&A could assist voters with disabilities and to explain their voting rights. The video was produced and captioned (for the hearing-impaired) in English and Tagalog, while the radio ads were produced in English, Chuuk, Tagalog, and Ilocano.

Collaborations with Organizations

Twenty-nine P&As reported collaborating with other organizations between FY2020 and FY2024. The organizations included local and state government agencies and civil society organizations. Some of these organizations — such as [state independent living councils](#), [state councils on developmental disabilities](#), chapters of the [National Federation of the Blind](#), and local nonprofits — are focused on supporting Americans with disabilities. P&As' PAVA programs often provide elections and voting expertise to these organizations through training and education. Disability-centered organizations also connect people with disabilities in their networks to P&As, which then reach out to and educate eligible voters in these networks.

P&As also collaborate with voting and voting-rights-focused organizations, such as local nonpartisan voter outreach groups, and state and local election offices. In collaboration with voting-focused organizations, P&As provide expertise on the experiences and needs of voters with disabilities, voting accessibility, and outreach to people with disabilities in their communities.

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We also under our HAVA grant work with election technology vendors, to ensure that their systems are accessible, and providing materials that...protection advocacy agency advocates can use to ensure that poll workers are trained properly...they can...hold a voter registration drive focused on voters with print disabilities and providing them documents that will educate blind and low vision voters and other voters with print disabilities about their rights, as voters. -Lou Ann Blake, National Federation of the Blind

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Some P&As participate in collaborative coalitions or working groups focused on voting, often with a particular emphasis on voting accessibility for people with disabilities. These coalitions enable P&As to pool resources with other organizations, share expertise, and reach a wider audience.

Case Study: The Arizona Disability Voter Coalition



Arizona's P&A, [Disability Rights Arizona](#), is a member of the Arizona Disability Voter Coalition (AzDVC), which it describes as "a statewide partnership of individuals, stakeholders, and organizations that work together to improve access to the electoral process for Arizonans with disabilities." Members include the SAAVI Services for the Blind, the Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona, the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, the Arizona Association of Providers for People with Disabilities, the Native American Disability Law Center, and the Citizens Clean Elections Commission, among others.

In early 2022, AzDVC identified COVID-19 as a barrier to in-person voter registration for people with disabilities. Before COVID, AzDVC had found that in-person voter registration was a highly effective way to conduct outreach to eligible voters with disabilities and wished to continue that work safely during the pandemic. Disability Rights Arizona applied for and was awarded a unique URL by the Arizona Secretary of State that gave the group the authority to conduct nonpartisan voter registration activities. Disability Rights Arizona shared the URL with AzDVC member organizations, and the coalition members were able to use it to safely and securely register voters with disabilities online.

During the 2024 election cycle, AzDVC also worked with state agencies and disability service providers to educate them on [Arizona's Special Election Boards](#), which some counties use to assist voters with disabilities who are unable to vote by mail or in person. According to Disability Rights Arizona, the Maricopa County Elections department reported that "it received over 600 requests for voting assistance using this service for the 2024 General Election alone, when all previous elections totaled only 300 requests," due in part to AzDVC's education efforts.

Individual Assistance

Most of the programs that P&As run, including PAVA, involve assisting individuals with disabilities in resolving specific issues. Twenty-five P&As reported assisting individuals under PAVA between FY2020 and FY2024. They help individuals navigate the voter registration process, obtain accommodations at voting locations, provide information about the voting process (e.g., the documentation required to register to vote), access resources for travel to voting locations, and submit requests to election officials.

Several P&As described individual assistance as a small component of their work, as many P&As receive only a few requests for assistance from individuals each year. Some have created outreach campaigns to inform more people with disabilities about P&As' assistance services. Wyoming's P&A, for example, has created an extensive advertising campaign with radio, TV, and online ads, as well as billboards and ads in movie theaters. The campaign informs viewers of their voting rights and provides information on how the P&A can assist them.

As part of their individual assistance work, most P&As operate voter hotlines on and around election dates, some of which are run in collaboration with other statewide organizations that work on elections and voting. Lawyers or voting experts typically staff these hotlines, and voters with disabilities call them to report accessibility issues they encounter while voting and to ask for assistance.

In some cases, individuals' requests for assistance reveal more extensive problems, such as a voting location that is not ADA-compliant or an accessible voting system that is not working. In those cases, P&As often alert state or local election officials directly so that they can address the issues.





Case Study: Missouri's Election Protection Hotline

On Election Day in 2020, [Missouri's P&A](#) participated in an [Election Protection Hotline](#) as part of its litigation and legal rapid response team. The hotline is a joint effort of the Missouri Voter Protection Coalition, which also includes religious institutions, bar associations, nonprofits, and universities. The hotline team includes outreach volunteers who visit voting locations to provide information about the hotline to voters.

Attorneys from the P&A "fielded calls from voters across the state and provided technical assistance to resolve access issues in Saint Charles County and Kansas City," according to its grant report.

Training and Educating Other Organizations

P&As interact with a wide range of organizations that work with people with disabilities and on voting and elections, including local and state government agencies, peer nonprofits, residential care facilities, and advocacy organizations. Twenty-two P&As provided training and education to these organizations between FY2020 and FY2024.

Most P&As work closely with organizations and institutions that serve people with disabilities. These organizations — including care centers, nursing homes, disability service provider agencies, and government offices — work with people with disabilities but usually do frequently lack expertise in voting and elections. P&As provide training and education to these organizations on voting rights and how best to assist voters with disabilities. Some P&As, for example, train staff at nursing homes and hospitals on best practices to assist voters with disabilities in registering to vote, requesting mail ballots, and getting to voting locations. P&As also work with DMVs and other government agencies to ensure that staff understand how to deliver identification and registration information to voters with disabilities.

Most P&As have strong working relationships with disability-focused organizations and advocacy groups, including local chapters of the [National Federation of the Blind](#), [state independent living councils](#), and [state councils on developmental disabilities](#). Many P&As work with organizations that support populations with a higher prevalence of disability, such as veterans' groups and homeless shelters. P&As provide these groups with training and education on voting rights and access for people with disabilities. They serve as voting experts and often provide educational materials that these organizations distribute to their communities.

Some P&As also provide expertise on disability and voting access to voting-related organizations. Much of this training is related to monitoring voting locations; P&As train volunteers from voting-related organizations who will be monitoring voting locations on how to spot and respond to ADA violations. In these cases, the P&As are the disability access experts.





Case Study: South Dakota State Independent Living Council

Under [federal law](#), every state and territory must have an [independent living council](#). The councils create and implement state-specific plans to improve independent living for people with disabilities. They work with organizations in the state to ensure that people with disabilities have the support to live independently, outside of institutions, whenever possible.

[Disability Rights South Dakota](#), South Dakota's P&A, serves on the [South Dakota State Independent Living Council](#). The P&A's voting team participates in quarterly meetings to review the independent living services in the state and provides voting-specific expertise and education to the council members. It ensures that voting rights and participation in elections are included in the council's plans for providing skills and independent living training to people with disabilities. The P&A also serves on the Advocacy/Interagency Collaboration Committee.

P&As assessed the state of voting accessibility and recommended areas for improvement.

Monitoring

One of the original and most important roles of P&As is to monitor the conditions inside institutions like hospitals, nursing homes, and psychiatric facilities for abuse, neglect, and rights violations. As the P&A system expanded to include voting accessibility, P&As applied this monitoring framework to their election-related priorities. In the context of PAVA, P&As monitor voting locations and ballot boxes for accessibility and ADA-compliance. They look for accessible parking availability, assistive technology like accessible voting devices, open and accessible doors, and appropriate signage. Twenty-five P&As reported monitoring voting locations and ballot boxes between FY2020 and FY2024.

Some P&As monitor voting locations and ballot boxes independently, often by recruiting volunteer monitors like college students or sending P&A staff around the state to assess sites in the weeks leading up to an election. Other P&As partner with organizations and train volunteers and staff on accessibility requirements so that those organizations can help monitor voting location accessibility.

Most P&As report accessibility issues they find to state or local election officials. Many make recommendations to poll workers and local election officials on the spot so that the issue can be resolved immediately. Some P&As also produce formal reports based on their findings that election officials can use to improve the next election. The P&As mostly report that local election officials and poll workers are receptive to their feedback and make the requested changes.

Some P&As take a more proactive approach by surveying polling sites before Election Day — either during the early voting period or, in the case of permanent drop boxes, at any time. This strategy lets P&As recommend improvements to election officials before most voters cast their ballots, thereby preventing accessibility issues from developing. At least one P&A has begun assessing party-run caucus sites for ADA-compliance before caucuses occur.





Case Study: District of Columbia 2022 General Election Report

The District of Columbia's P&A, [Disability Rights DC \(DRDC\)](#), monitors accessibility during every major DC election. DRDC surveyed 87 of the 90 vote centers (97%) in the district during the 2022 general election. The monitors documented the accessibility barriers they encountered at voting locations and provided on-the-spot recommendations to poll workers and DC Board of Elections staff.

DRDC found that 64 of the 90 vote centers (71%) were in some way inaccessible during the 2022 election. Sixty-one vote centers (68%) had barriers the P&A identified as operational, meaning that they could be fixed by poll workers and Board of Elections staff. These barriers included missing signage, lack of accessible voting equipment, and movable physical barriers. In six locations, barriers were structurally inaccessible, such as broken elevators or narrow doorways, meaning that election officials could not remedy the problem.

At 33 vote centers (37%), poll workers and election officials made the recommended changes immediately.

DRDC also inspected 51 of DC's 55 ballot boxes (93%) during the 2022 general election. It found that only one ballot box was structurally inaccessible, while seven were operationally inaccessible.

After the 2022 election, [DRDC produced a report](#) on its monitoring efforts. The report included a list of all the barriers the monitors identified at every vote center and ballot box along with specific recommendations to remedy the problems. DRDC shared the report with the DC Board of Elections, the DC Council, the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, the DC Consortium of Legal Services Providers, the Restore the Vote Coalition, and the public.

DRDC [assessed the accessibility of vote centers](#) and ballot boxes again in the 2024 primary and general elections. DRDC found modest improvements in accessibility in the 2022 general, 2024 primary, and 2024 general elections. In the 2024 general election, 62% of vote centers were in some way inaccessible — a 10 percentage point decrease from 2022.

Research and Analysis

Twelve P&As performed and published research on the accessibility of voting in their states between FY2020 and FY2024. Research and analysis are some of the less common activities P&As undertake under PAVA.

The research is often centered on P&As' monitoring of voting locations and ballot boxes. P&As publish the results of their monitoring both to give election officials insight into how they can improve accessibility and to increase public awareness of the issue. A few P&As also survey people with disabilities in their states or do focus groups to gain insight into their experiences. P&As occasionally partner with academic researchers on projects related to voting accessibility.

P&As share their research findings with election officials, other disability-focused organizations and agencies, the public, and occasionally the press. Because most research conducted under PAVA is related to accessibility of the voting process, election officials are an important audience for this research.



Case Study: Report on Election Accessibility for Voters with Disabilities in Ohio



[Disability Rights Ohio](#), Ohio's P&A, [published research into systemic barriers](#) voters with disabilities experienced during the 2020 primary and general elections. The report highlighted barriers related to the state's process for unexpectedly hospitalized voters, personal ballot delivery requests for homebound and facility-bound voters, curbside voting, and remote mail ballot marking. The report provided recommendations to eliminate barriers.

Disability Rights Ohio drew on data from individual requests for assistance and hotline calls that it received throughout the year, systematic advocacy work, and collaborations with other voting-related groups in Ohio.

Conclusion

Congress has taken several steps over the past 60 years to improve voting access for Americans with disabilities. The Help America Vote Act of 2002 contained several provisions designed to improve voting access and ensure people with disabilities could vote. Sections 261 and 291 of HAVA established grant programs to improve voting accessibility for people with disabilities. The grants have helped states and P&As improve voting location accessibility, educate policymakers and election officials, and ensure people with disabilities can vote privately and independently.

Voting accessibility has improved since the passage of HAVA. In 2000, two years before Congress passed HAVA, the disability turnout gap was 16.8 percentage points; in 2020, the turnout gap [had fallen to 11.3 percentage points](#). Increasingly, P&As are shifting toward systemic advocacy and proactive support of voters with disabilities, conducting voter outreach, and working with communities and election officials alike. Election officials, advocates, voters, and policymakers have made substantive progress toward making voting fully accessible. State election offices and P&As, and the HAVA funds they receive, have been an important part of that progress.

HAVA has helped voters, advocates, and election officials improve voting access for Americans with disabilities, but challenges remain. These voters are still [11 percentage points](#) less likely to vote than nondisabled voters, and they report voting difficulties at [three times the rate](#) of their nondisabled peers. In [most states](#), turnout rates reveal that voters are still deterred from voting due to disability or illness.

Given these remaining challenges, continued federal support is critical to ensuring Americans with disabilities have full voting access.



Appendix: Data and Methods

Section 291: Accessibility Grants to P&As

Appropriations and Spending

Data on annual Section 291 appropriations for FY2003 to FY2011 and for FY2025 comes from [congressional appropriations bills](#). Data for FY2012 to FY2024 comes from ACL's [annual presidential budget justifications](#), which include data on previous years' actual congressional appropriations. Data on how much funding P&As receive [comes from ACL](#).

Grant Activities

Most of the data on Section 291 came from the P&As' annual performance reports. P&As must submit annual reports to HHS. HHS uses a form called the One PPR as the standard reporting form for grant recipients. On the One PPR, P&As describe their activities during the previous fiscal year and lay out their goals and priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. They also report demographic information on who the P&As helped, the strategies used to implement their goals, the number of people helped, and a narrative explanation of the P&A's activities.

For this report, we obtained all of the PAVA-related data from the One PPR reports that the P&As submitted to the Administration for Community Living between FY2020 and FY2024. ACL provided the PAVA-related narratives and aggregated statistics in response to a Freedom of Information Act request.

The One PPR lays out nine grant activity categories, or "strategies," and asks P&As to identify which strategies they used to implement their goals. We used these strategies as the basis for dividing P&As' activities into 10 PAVA-specific activities. We tagged all the activities described in the narratives as one (or more) of these strategies.

The nine strategies in the One PPR are not all applicable to the PAVA program. In interviews, several P&A staff members described limitations in the One PPR strategies. For example, "Investigations of Abuse and Neglect" is one of the strategies in the One PPR but is not relevant to PAVA activities. P&As also undertake activities — for example, research and analysis—that are not on the One PPR's list. We adjusted the strategies based on the interviews, removing irrelevant ones, and adding our own when appropriate.

We also conducted semistructured interviews with PAVA staff at seven P&As to supplement the information in the performance reports.



Limitations

The One PPRs were a valuable source of information on how the P&As spent their PAVA grant funds. However, the data has several limitations.

The first is that we did not receive a PAVA narrative from each P&A for each year. We have at least one narrative from 42 of the 57 P&As (74%) for the period between FY2020 and FY2024. For any given year, we received narratives from half or fewer of the 57 P&As (ranging from 37% in FY2021 to 51% in FY2022) (Table 1). But the fact that we did not receive a narrative of PAVA activities does not mean that the P&A did not in fact engage in PAVA activities, nor does it mean that the P&A did not submit a report describing its non-PAVA-related activity.

Table 1. P&A PAVA narratives received, FY2020 to FY2024.

Source: P&As' One PPR forms, obtained via public records requests to ACL.

State	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Years Reported
Average	42%	37%	51%	46%	49%	2.25
Alabama			✓			1
Alaska						0
American Samoa			✓			1
Arizona	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Arkansas		✓	✓	✓	✓	4
California						0
Colorado			✓			1
Connecticut		✓			✓	2
Delaware	✓		✓	✓	✓	4
Florida						0
Georgia						0
Guam			✓	✓	✓	3
Hawaii	✓	✓	✓	✓		4
Idaho	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Illinois			✓	✓	✓	3
Indiana						0
Iowa					✓	1
Kansas						0
Kentucky				✓		1
Louisiana						0
Maine	✓					1
Maryland		✓		✓	✓	3
Massachusetts	✓	✓	✓		✓	4
Michigan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Minnesota	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Mississippi	✓				✓	2
Missouri	✓	✓	✓	✓		4
Montana	✓		✓		✓	3
Native American P&A						0
Nebraska						0
Nevada						0
New Hampshire	✓				✓	2
New Jersey						0
New Mexico	✓	✓	✓			3
New York	✓	✓	✓	✓		4
North Carolina						0
North Dakota		✓		✓	✓	3
Northern Mariana Islands					✓	1
Ohio		✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Oklahoma	✓	✓				2
Oregon						0
Pennsylvania			✓			1
Puerto Rico	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Rhode Island			✓	✓	✓	3
South Carolina	✓	✓		✓		3
South Dakota	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Tennessee				✓	✓	2
Texas					✓	1
Utah	✓		✓	✓	✓	4
Vermont	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Virgin Islands						0
Virginia	✓		✓		✓	3
Washington						0
Washington, DC			✓	✓		2
West Virginia	✓		✓	✓	✓	4
Wisconsin	✓	✓	✓	✓		4
Wyoming	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5

Second, the PAVA narratives that we received vary in the amount of detail provided. Some P&As describe every activity the P&A does under every grant program in detail; other narratives are much less detailed, so the dataset captures only a partial picture of the activities that the P&As engaged in. Because we do not have PAVA narratives from every P&A for each year, and some of them have relatively little information, it is not possible to accurately quantify the activities that were carried out by P&As.

Third, even if we were to restrict our analysis to the most complete PAVA narratives that we received, it would be difficult to estimate the number of people affected by P&A activities. Although the One PPR requires P&As to report the number of people impacted by each activity, P&As took different approaches to identifying the number of people they served under PAVA. In states where P&As undertook systematic reform efforts like providing technical assistance on legislation, some P&As reported the number of people served as the total number of people with disabilities in the state, arguing that all people with disabilities benefited from their work. Other P&As reported that comparable systemic work benefited zero people because, in the words of one P&A report, “there is no appropriate performance measure option in this ONE PPR section.” The differences in reporting standards for basic statistics point to a concern a number of P&As highlighted in narrative reports and interviews: The One PPR is poorly equipped to assess systemic efforts that are typical PAVA work.

Section 261: Accessibility Grants to State Election Offices

Appropriations and Spending

Data on annual appropriations to HHS to grant to states comes from [congressional appropriations bills](#).

Grant Activities

It is difficult to assemble a complete picture of how states spent Section 261 funds, mostly because the last congressional appropriation for the program was in 2011. The vast majority of grant reports and other records are outside both federal and state document retention periods and are difficult or impossible to obtain. We obtained grant reports from only three states: Florida, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin. We also obtained data on states’ activities with Section 261 funds from the [2003 to 2004](#) and [2009 to 2010](#) HHS reports to Congress on HAVA.





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