

PROTECTION AND
ADVOCACY FOR
PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES, INC.

VOTING RIGHTS OF SOUTH CAROLINIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Every vote counts! Unfortunately, this key belief of Americans has not always been true for citizens with disabilities. Many individuals with disabilities have not had access to their polling places or to secret ballots.

HAVA (the Help America Vote Act of 2002) is a new law whose goals include making access to the electoral process equal for **all** Americans. P&A is part of the effort to enforce HAVA through its new **Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access (PAVA)** program. PAVA's purpose is to ensure full participation in all parts of the electoral process for individuals with disabilities--registering to vote, accessing polling places and casting a vote. P&A and other organizations representing individuals with disabilities served on the South Carolina Election Commission's committee to develop the state plan to implement HAVA. You can review the state plan on the Election Commission's website: <http://www.state.sc.us/scsec/HAVA.htm>.

By January 1, 2006 South Carolina must:

- ✓ Provide at least one voting machine per precinct that is accessible to people with disabilities (voice-activated, allow blind people to vote in privacy and adjustable in height) and
- ✓ Provide voters an opportunity to check for and correct errors on ballots.

These new requirements are in addition to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which require state and local governments to provide accessible programs and facilities, such as accessible polling places and voter registration sites.

HAVA provides funds to each state's Protection and Advocacy system to enable voters with disabilities to advocate for equal access to the electoral process. P&A will use PAVA funds to:

- ✓ Educate voters and persons involved in the electoral process about the rights of citizens with disabilities;
- ✓ Provide people with disabilities with information about voter registration and the chance to register to vote;
- ✓ Work with groups representing individuals with disabilities and other civic organizations in registering voters, surveying polling places for accessibility, and reviewing training materials developed for election

officials. **As a nonprofit corporation, P&A will not advocate for any candidate or ballot issue.**

- ✓ Represent individuals who have administrative complaints about the electoral process, although the law prohibits P&A using HAVA funds for litigation.
- ✓ Provide advice about access to polling places on Election Day.

You can read more about PAVA on the Protection and Advocacy website, www.protectionandadvocacy-sc.org.

Register to vote!

If you are not already a registered voter, contact your county voter registration office (list available at <http://www.state.sc.us/scsec/votereg.htm>) or get the form at <http://www.state.sc.us/scsec/vr/index.html>. You will find the Voter Registration office in the telephone book county government listings.

You can also register to vote at any office of the Division of Motor Vehicles, Department of Social Services, Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, DHEC/WIC Program, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Commission for the Blind, Department of Mental Health, Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services or P&A.

Contact us!

If you need additional information, call the P&A Help Line:

Toll-Free statewide:

In Columbia area:

1-866-275-7273 (Voice/TTY)

1-803-782-0639 (Voice/TTY)

You may also view fact sheets and articles on disability issues at our web site:

www.protectionandadvocacy-sc.org.

This publication provides legal information, but is not intended to be legal advice. The information was based on the law at the time it was written. As the law may change, please contact the P&A Help Line for updates.

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P&A does not discriminate on the basis of disability, race, gender, or national origin in the provision of its programs or services. Pete Cantrell is P&A's designated coordinator for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. March 2004. PAVA-01