



Access The Vote

VOTING ACCESSIBILITY IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DURING THE JULY 15, 2025 SPECIAL ELECTION

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INTRODUCTION

Disability Rights DC at University Legal Services (DRDC) is the Protection & Advocacy (P&A) organization for the District of Columbia. We are federally-mandated to represent people with disabilities and ensure their access to facilities, services, and programs in DC. The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) charged P&A organizations throughout the nation, including DRDC, to “ensure full participation in the electoral process for individuals with disabilities, including registering to vote, casting a vote and accessing polling places.” 52 U.S.C. § 21601. As a result of a settlement agreement in *American Association of People with Disabilities v. District of Columbia*, DC agreed to make all polling places accessible to persons with disabilities by the 2004 Presidential Primary.

Since 2004, DRDC has surveyed polling places during Presidential and DC major elections and reported on the results of those surveys to the DC Board of Elections (BOE) and the public to promote 100% voting accessibility for DC voters with disabilities.¹ In addition to conducting surveys and

¹ See, e.g., DRDC, [Access the Vote: Voting Accessibility in the District of Columbia During the November 5, 2024 General Election \(2025\)](#), ([2024 General Election Report](#)); DRDC, [DC Voting Access Report: Voting Accessibility During the June 4, 2024 Primary Election \(2024\)](#), ([2024 Primary Election Report](#)); DRDC, [DC Voting Access Report on the November 8, 2022 General Election \(2022\)](#), ([2022 General Election Report](#)); DRDC, [DC Voting Access Report on the June 21, 2022 Primary Election \(2022\)](#) ([2022 Primary Election Report](#)); DRDC, [DC Voting Access Report on the November 3, 2020 General Election \(2020\)](#) ([2020 General Election Report](#)); DRDC, [DC Voting Access Report on the June 2, 2020 Primary Election \(2020\)](#) ([2020 Primary Election Report](#)); DRDC, [DC Voting Access Report on the June 19, 2018 Primary Election \(2018\)](#) ([2018 Primary Election Report](#)); DRDC, [DC Voting Access Report on the June 14, 2016 Presidential Primary Election \(2016\)](#) ([2016 Primary Election Report](#)); DRDC, [DC Voting Access: The November 4, 2014 Mayoral Election \(2014\)](#) (on file with DRDC); DRDC, [DC Voting Access: The April 1, 2014 Mayoral Primary \(2014\)](#) (on file with DRDC); DRDC, [DC Voting Access: The April 23, 2013 Special Election \(2013\)](#) (on file with DRDC); DRDC, [DC Voting Access: The November 6, 2012 Presidential Election \(2012\)](#) (on file with DRDC); DRDC, [DC Voting Access: Behind Closed Doors, The April 3, 2012 Presidential Primary \(2012\)](#) (on file with DRDC); DRDC, [DC Voting Access during the April 26, 2011 Special Election \(2011\)](#) (on file with DRDC); DRDC, [No Parity at the Polls: Four Years Later, Accessibility Survey for the February 12, 2008 Presidential Primary Election \(2008\)](#) (on file with DRDC).

producing reports, DRDC meets and works with BOE officials, testifies before the DC Council about voter accessibility issues, and assists with accessibility training for election day workers and surveyors. For over 20 years, DRDC has provided BOE a checklist to help poll workers ensure vote center accessibility. DRDC’s accessibility checklist was adopted as a national model by the former national disability rights organization, Project Vote. DRDC also advocates to resolve accessibility barriers during early voting and on Election Day and recommends solutions to BOE and poll workers.

This report analyzes the accessibility of vote centers and ballot drop boxes utilized during early voting and on Election Day for the July 15, 2025 Special Election and identifies issues that hindered access by voters with disabilities to enter voting areas and cast their ballots. It is authored by Elizabeth Myerholtz (DRDC Staff Attorney).

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

DRDC’s surveyors evaluated vote centers and ballot drop boxes throughout the District for accessibility, consistent with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the U.S. Department of Justice’s 2010 Standards for Accessible Design.² Based on the results of the surveys, vote centers and ballot drop boxes found to be out of compliance with these requirements are labelled as either **structurally inaccessible** or **operationally inaccessible** (or in some cases, both structurally and operationally inaccessible).

Vote centers and ballot drop boxes are labelled **structurally inaccessible** if voters with disabilities could not independently³ get to the

² 42 U.S.C. § 12130 *et seq.*; 28 C.F.R. Part 35 *et seq.*; U.S. Dep’t of Just., 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, available at <https://archive.ada.gov/regs2010/2010ADASTandards/2010ADASTandards.htm#titleII> (last visited Jan. 23, 2026); U.S. Dep’t of Just., ADA Checklist for Polling Places, available at <https://www.ada.gov/resources/polling-places-checklist/> (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

³ In addition to the standard definition of “independent,” as used in this report, the term encompasses whether a voter can reach a doorbell or automatic door opener without

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voting area or vote due to issues that BOE staff or poll workers *could not* have remedied (e.g., stairs, ramps that did not comply with ADA requirements, broken elevators, and/or narrow doorways).

Vote centers and ballot drop boxes are labelled **operationally inaccessible** if voters with disabilities could not get to the voting area or vote due to issues that BOE staff or poll workers *could* have remedied (e.g., impermanent barriers in the path to the drop box or vote center's accessible entrance that were not removed, incorrect or missing signage, and/or for vote centers with no available assistive equipment).

assistance and/or enter the voting area by virtue of responsive vote center staff or automatic door activation.

RESULTS OF ACCESSIBILITY SURVEYS

During the July 15, 2025 Special Election cycle, DRDC staff surveyed 11 of the 12 vote centers designated by BOE (91.67% of the total). **27.27% (3/11) of the vote centers surveyed were found to be structurally inaccessible, operationally inaccessible, or both structurally and operationally inaccessible.** DRDC staff also successfully surveyed 3 of the 4 ballot drop boxes designated by BOE (75% of the total). **33.33% (1/3) of the three ballot drop boxes surveyed were inaccessible.**

There is a detailed analysis of the reasons vote centers and a ballot drop box were found inaccessible and recommendations to increase accessibility beginning on page 6 of this report.

BOE'S RESPONSE TO DRDC'S RECOMMENDATIONS

DRDC staff consistently work to bring any prevalent voting barriers identified by voters with disabilities to BOE staff. During early voting and on Election Day, DRDC staff made on-the-spot recommendations to poll workers and BOE staff with the goal of immediately resolving accessibility barriers. These efforts and BOE's responses are noted for each vote center below. BOE poll workers and staff at least partially responded to DRDC's recommendations to correct accessibility barriers at 3 vote centers.

The next section details each of the vote centers and ballot drop boxes found to be structurally and/or operationally inaccessible, along with specific recommendations for improved accessibility. DRDC has also provided recommendations to improve vote centers that were not found to be inaccessible but still presented accessibility concerns.

A table of all vote centers surveyed (including indications of which vote centers were found inaccessible) is included in Appendix A. A table of all ballot drop boxes surveyed (including indications of which ballot drop boxes were found inaccessible) is included in Appendix B.

INACCESSIBLE VOTE CENTERS



This photo, taken July 11, 2025, shows a large curb along the route from the parking area to the vote center entrance. This route was designated as the accessible route (as shown by the sign in the photo), even though the curb presented an abrupt rise.

Patterson Elementary School – 4399 South Capitol Terrace SW, 20032

This vote center was both ***structurally inaccessible*** and ***operationally inaccessible***. The vote center was ***structurally inaccessible*** because there was no curb cut from the parking lot to the pathway to the vote center entrance, thereby creating an abrupt rise in the pathway. There was no additional, accessible entrance to the vote center and thus voters parking in the lot had no way to accessibly reach the vote center entrance.

This vote center was ***operationally inaccessible*** for two reasons. First, there was no accessible parking. Though there was a parking lot, none of the spaces were designated as accessible. Second, there were no signs indicating

the location of the accessible entrance (which was the main entrance to the vote center).

DRDC’s surveyor noted these various issues during early voting and brought them to BOE’s attention. BOE corrected these issues by designating two accessible parking spaces in the parking lot and installing a temporary ramp over the curb cut at the parking lot. DRDC resurveyed this vote center on Election Day and these issues were all corrected.

Recommendations: Remove or remedy all structural barriers, including abrupt rises. Ensure at least two accessible parking spaces are designated in the parking lot. Place adequate signage indicating the location of and route to the accessible entrance.

Past Reports that Noted Relevant Problem(s) at this Vote Center:

June 19, 2018 Primary Election	Abrupt rise.
June 14, 2016 Primary Election	Abrupt rise.

Union Temple Baptist Church – 1125 W Street SE, 20020

This vote center was both **structurally inaccessible** and **operationally inaccessible**. The vote center was **structurally inaccessible** because there was an abrupt rise of over half an inch in the sidewalk from the parking lot to the vote center entrance. The sidewalk pavers were not flatly aligned, creating the abrupt rise in the path.

This vote center was **operationally inaccessible** because the elevator that was necessary for voters to accessibly access the voting area lacked audible indicators. Additionally, the audio headset was originally not plugged into the ballot marking device, though this was fixed at the request of DRDC’s surveyor. The ballot marking devices also were not arranged to protect voters’ privacy.

Recommendations: Remove or remedy all structural barriers, including abrupt rises. Ensure that elevators are accessible to voters with disabilities.

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Ensure ready availability of all auxiliary aids, including by plugging in headsets to electronic ballot marking devices. Position all electronic ballot marking devices facing away from the main voting area to ensure privacy for voters.

Past Reports that Noted Relevant Problem(s) at this Vote Center:

June 4, 2024 Primary Election	Inaccessible elevator.
November 8, 2022 General Election	Inaccessible elevator.
June 21, 2022 Primary Election	Inaccessible elevator. No audio headset.
November 3, 2020 General Election	Inaccessible elevator. No privacy.
June 14, 2016 Primary Election	Inaccessible elevator.
November 4, 2014 General Election	Abrupt rise. Inaccessible elevator.
April 23, 2013 Special Election	No audio headset.
November 6, 2012 General Election	Inaccessible elevator.
April 26, 2011 Special Election	Abrupt rise.

Simon Elementary School – 401 Mississippi Avenue SE, 20032

This vote center was **operationally inaccessible** for two reasons. First, the elevator that was used to get to the voting area inside the vote center lacked audible floor indicators. Second, there were many obstructions in the pathway to the voting area. Several tables and desk chairs were in the hallway leading to the voting area, but these were moved at the request of DRDC's surveyor.

DRDC's surveyor also noted that there was insufficient staff at this location. The poll workers were floating between the accessible entrance and curbside voting areas as there were not enough staff to be permanently located at either area. The doors at this vote center were not propped, so a staff member needed to remain at the doors to ensure accessibility at the vote center entrance.

Recommendations: Ensure that elevators are accessible to voters with disabilities. Ensure the path to the voting area is free from obstructions. Ensure adequate staffing at all vote centers. Prop open heavy doors.

VOTE CENTERS PRESENTING OTHER ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

The following vote centers, though not marked as inaccessible for the purposes of this report, presented various accessibility concerns. DRDC has noted the concerns below, as well as included recommendations for BOE to remedy these issues in the future.

Anacostia Public Library – 1800 Marion Barry Avenue SE, 20020

The doors at this vote center were closed, but there was a poll worker stationed at the door and a working automatic door opener, making the entrance accessible.

Recommendation: Prop open heavy doors.

Ferebee-Hope Recreation Center – 799 Yuma Street SE, 20020

The doors at this vote center were closed, but there was a poll worker stationed at the door, making the entrance accessible.

Recommendation: Prop open heavy doors.

Past Reports that Noted Relevant Problem(s) at this Vote Center:

November 5, 2024 General Election	Unpropped heavy doors without working backup system.
June 4, 2024 Primary Election	Unpropped heavy doors without working backup system.
June 21, 2022 Primary Election	Unpropped heavy doors without working backup system.

The ARC – 1901 Mississippi Avenue SE, 20020

The doors at this vote center were closed, but there was a poll worker stationed at the door, making the entrance accessible.

The site coordinator originally refused DRDC’s surveyor access to survey the vote center. At DRDC’s instruction, the site coordinator contacted

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BOE's ADA Coordinator, who then instructed her to grant DRDC's surveyors access to the vote center.

Recommendations: Prop open heavy doors. Educate site coordinators on role of DRDC surveyors and DRDC's access authority under federal law.

Past Reports that Noted Relevant Problem(s) at this Vote Center:

November 5, 2024 General Election	Unpropped doors.
June 4, 2024 Primary Election	Unpropped doors.

Allen A.M.E. Church – 2498 Alabama Avenue SE, 20020

The ballot marking devices were positioned in front of mirrors so that people looking at the mirrors could see the screens of the ballot marking devices. Therefore, there was insufficient privacy for voters at the ballot marking devices.

Recommendation: Position all electronic ballot marking devices away from mirrors to ensure privacy for voters with disabilities.

Past Reports that Noted Relevant Problem(s) at this Vote Center:

November 5, 2024 General Election	No privacy.
June 4, 2024 Primary Election	No privacy.
June 14, 2016 Primary Election	No privacy.

Covenant Baptist Church – 3845 South Capitol Street SW, 20032

The doors at this vote center were closed, but there was a poll worker stationed at the door, making the entrance accessible. Additionally, the audio headset was not plugged into the ballot marking device. Rather than plug it in, the site coordinator advised DRDC's surveyor that it would be plugged in only as needed.

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Recommendations: Prop open heavy doors. Ensure ready availability of all auxiliary aids, including by plugging in headsets to electronic ballot marking devices.

Past Reports that Noted Relevant Problem(s) at this Vote Center:

June 4, 2024 Primary Election	Unpropped doors.
November 8, 2022 General Election	Unpropped doors.
June 21, 2022 Primary Election	No audio headset.
November 3, 2020 General Election	Closed, heavy doors with no working backup system.
June 19, 2018 Primary Election	Unpropped doors.
June 14, 2016 Primary Election	Unpropped doors.
November 4, 2014 General Election	Closed, heavy doors with no working backup system.

INACCESSIBLE BALLOT DROP BOX

Navy Yard-Ballpark Metro (WMATA) – SE corner of M Street SE & Half Street SE, 20024

This ballot drop box was ***operationally inaccessible*** for several reasons. First, there were several loose pavers in the sidewalk in front of the ballot drop box, creating an unstable surface. Second, some of the uneven pavers caused two abrupt rises of over half an inch in the area in front of the drop box. Third, there was an obstruction in front of the drop box – an e-bike had been parked in a way that was blocking the drop box. DRDC’s surveyor remedied this by moving the e-bike out of the way of the drop box.

Recommendations: Ensure the path to the drop box is free of obstructions and abrupt rises.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: VOTE CENTERS SURVEYED

DRDC successfully surveyed 11 of the 12 (91.67% of the total) available vote centers during the Special Election. The vote center that was not surveyed was Van Ness Elementary School (1150 5th Street SE, 20003).

Vote Center	Address
Anacostia Public Library	1800 Marion Barry Avenue SE, 20020
Ferebee-Hope Recreation Center	700 Yuma Street SE, 20032
Patterson Elementary School*	4399 South Capitol Terrace SW, 20032
THEARC	1901 Mississippi Avenue SE, 20020
Hendley Elementary School	425 Chesapeake Street SE, 20032
Allen A.M.E. Church	2489 Alabama Avenue SE, 20020
Covenant Baptist Church	3845 South Capitol SW, 20032
Union Temple Baptist Church*	1125 W Street SE, 20020
Simon Elementary School*	401 Mississippi Avenue SE, 20032
Turner Elementary School	3264 Stanton Road SE, 20020
Anacostia High School	1601 16th Street SE, 20020

*Denotes vote centers DRDC found to be inaccessible.

APPENDIX B: BALLOT DROP BOXES SURVEYED

DRDC successfully surveyed 3 of the 4 available ballot drop boxes (75% of the total). The only ballot drop box that was not surveyed was located at Parklands-Turner Library (1547 Alabama Avenue SE, 20032).

Ballot Drop Box	Address
Bellevue (William O. Lockridge) Library	115 Atlantic Street SW, 20032
Department of Human Services	2100 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE, 20020
Navy Yard-Ballpark Metro (WMATA)*	SE Corner of M & Half Street SE (Entrance/Exit Location), 20024

*Denotes ballot drop boxes DRDC found to be inaccessible.