

## Episode 2: Voting Resources

**KEITH CASEBONNE:** Hi, I'm Keith Casebonne. Welcome to "You First," brought to you by Disability Rights Florida. The purpose of You First is to discuss the rights of individuals with disabilities, putting your rights first. This episode is the second of our "Access The Vote" series, where we're spending four episodes focusing on voting rights.

This podcast is produced by Disability Rights Florida, a not-for-profit corporation working to protect and advance the rights of Floridians with disabilities through advocacy and education. You can learn more about Disability Rights Florida on our website at [DisabilityRightsFlorida.org](http://DisabilityRightsFlorida.org).

In this episode, we will cover important topics including: how and where to register to vote, the three different ways you can vote, and accessible voting machines.

To talk about these topics, we are speaking with Dana Farmer, the Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access or "PAVA" Coordinator with Disability Rights Florida.

About 19% of the U.S. population consists of persons living with a disability, this is an important part of the population that has the right to vote in upcoming elections.

Hi, Dana. Thanks for being here today. Registering to vote is obviously a crucial step to being eligible to vote in all elections in Florida. Are voters with disabilities required to make any special arrangements in order to register?

**DANA FARMER:** No, Keith, they're not. If people with disabilities would like to register to vote, they are not required to make any special arrangements outside of those any Florida voter is required to make.

However, all people with disabilities are entitled to receive assistance in the voter registration process if they request it. They do not have to disclose their disabilities when asking for assistance.

Everyone should keep in mind deadlines for registering to vote. This year, all voters must be registered by October the 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016 to vote in the general election. If you are not registered in time, you won't be eligible to vote in the general election.

Other important deadlines for the upcoming election could be found on our [AccessTheVote.org](http://AccessTheVote.org) website.

**KEITH CASEBONNE:** So, how does one register to vote?

**DANA FARMER:** There are actually two ways to register to vote. You can register in person or you can register to vote by mail, Keith.

To register, eligible voters must complete a Voter Registration Application. A link to the application can be found on the [AccessTheVote.org](https://www.AccessTheVote.org) website. Links can also be found on each website of the county Supervisors of Elections. If you are a new voter, check the box on the form that says "new voter." If you are completing the form at home and need assistance, your spouse, your parent, or your child can help you.

**KEITH CASEBONNE: So, Dana, you mentioned that you can register in person. Where does someone go to register in person?**

**DANA FARMER:** There are several places you can go to register in person. One is into the office of your Supervisor or Elections and register in person there. There's some other places that you can register and they include local library branches, armed service recruitment offices, tax collector offices and the Department of Motor Vehicles are all places where people can register to vote. You can also register where you receive state-funded services, if you are a person with a disability. This includes behavioral health providers, the Agency for Person with Disabilities waiver support coordinators, Centers for Independent Living, Disability Services on college campuses, to name a few.

**KEITH CASEBONNE: And so if you are already registered, but you've moved and need to change your address or you want to change your party, how does someone go about changing their voter registration information?**

**DANA FARMER:** All voters who still meet Florida's voter registration requirements are eligible to apply to change and/or to update the information listed on their voter registration card.

Using the Voter Registration form that we've previously discussed, check the box "Record Update/Change." Situations requiring a new card may include: a change of address, change of party affiliation, a change of your last name, a replacement for a lost card, and then there is a signature update. Your signatures change over time. Keep in mind that your signature determines if your vote-by-mail ballot is valid.

**KEITH CASEBONNE: So, Dana, do you need any particular identification to register to vote?**

**DANA FARMER:** You do. First-time registering by mail requires either a current valid driver's license number or a Florida identification card number. If you don't have either of these, you can use the last four digits of your Social Security Number.

If you are registering by mail and have never voted in Florida and have never been issued one of the previously mentioned ID numbers, include one of the following with your application, or at a later date before you vote: A copy of an ID that shows your name and photo. This may include: a U.S. Passport, a debit or credit card with a photo, military ID, student ID, retirement center ID, neighborhood association ID, or public assistance ID; or a copy of an ID that shows your name and current residence address (acceptable documents include the following: a utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document).

The previous special identification requirements are not required if you are 65 or older, or if you have a temporary or permanent physical disability. For details on this, it would be best if you called your own Supervisor of Elections.

**KEITH CASEBONNE:** And by the way, you can get the information to contact your Supervisor of Elections from the [AccessTheVote.org](http://AccessTheVote.org) website.  
**So, what important deadlines should one be aware of in the registration process?**

**DANA FARMER:** Well there's several. The deadline to register to vote is October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

Some other dates to know include: General Election Early Voting Period: October 29-November 5. However, early voting may start up to 5 days earlier than October 29<sup>th</sup>, so check with your local Supervisor for what's going on in your county. Election Day 2016 is November the 8<sup>th</sup>.

If you are a person who will be voting by mail, don't forget to request your ballot. All voting deadlines can be found on the [AccessTheVote.org](http://AccessTheVote.org) website.

**KEITH CASEBONNE:** So, registering is of course just the first step. Now let's talk about actually casting a ballot. What are the ways someone can vote in Florida?

**DANA FARMER:** There are three ways to vote in Florida, Keith: You can vote by mail, you can participate in early voting, or you can vote on Election Day.

**KEITH CASEBONNE:** I'm sure each method has its pros and cons. Let's talk about them one by one. So, we'll start with voting by mail. Why would someone consider voting by mail?

**DANA FARMER:** Voting by mail is a great option for voters who prefer to vote at home and at their own pace as well to control their voting experience.

You may request a vote-by-mail ballot or an immediate family member may request one for you.

When you receive the vote-by-mail ballot, anyone can help you fill it out, as long as they are not your employer, an agent of your employer, or an agent or officer of your union.

Whoever helped you fill it out may even mail the ballot back to the Supervisor of Elections for you, if you like.

By the way, if you are someone who does not have a photo ID and registered using the last four digits of your Social Security Number, your only option may be voting by mail, as you won't have proper photo ID if you go to the poll to vote in person.

**KEITH CASEBONNE: That's an interesting point about voting by mail. So why would someone then consider voting during early voting?**

**DANA FARMER:** The places chosen for early voting are, in general, designed to be quite accessible. They include things such as libraries, courthouses, community centers.

Accessible voting machines are available at all Early Voting locations just like they are on Election Day. The early voting polling places may have more accessible parking places than some Election Day polling places.

Also, the early voting polling places are much more likely to have accessible bathrooms than some of the polling places in use on Election Day. This is because some of the Election Day polling places may be in locations like churches, which are not required to meet ADA accessibility standards for bathrooms.

At the polls, anyone may help you fill your ballot, as long as they are not your employer, an agent of your employer, or an agent or officer of your union.

**KEITH CASEBONNE:** I'd say another benefit of early voting of course is that you have a date range to go, so you're not locked down to just one specific date -- you know, when you are available, you can go.

**DANA FARMER:** Exactly.

**KEITH CASEBONNE: So then why would someone consider voting on Election Day on November 8<sup>th</sup>?**

**DANA FARMER:** Voting in person on Election Day is available for all Floridians at your assigned polling place and, Keith, some people just enjoy voting with their neighbors at the precincts. Often their poll workers are also their neighbors.

Some voters with disabilities like to check on the accessibility of their precincts. As you may recall, we mentioned that early voting sites are likely to be more accessible, so there are some voters with disabilities who are voting advocates who like to just keep an eye on how accessible the actual precincts are.

Similar to Early Voting, polling places are required to have at least one accessible voting machine, and all voters are entitled to assistance at the polls. Some voters with disabilities like to check on the accessibility of the precincts.

**KEITH CASEBONNE: Well, Dana, you just mentioned the accessible voting machines. What types of accessible voting machines are used in Florida?**

**DANA FARMER:** Well first, Keith, it's The Help America Vote Act that requires at least one voting machine in every polling place be accessible to anyone who has a disability.

So, in Florida, there are two types of accessible voting machines: Direct Recording Electronic Systems and also Ballot Marking Devices and Systems.

Voters using a Direct Recording Electronic (also known as the DRE) system will cast their vote through a touch screen, dial, or a mechanical button. The DRE system then stores your vote into the computer's memory. Some DRE systems are also equipped with a printer for voters to confirm his or her choices before committing them to the computer's memory. The paper records can be saved in case of an audit or a recount.

The second type is a ballot marking device, which uses a touch screen for voters to make their selections. Unlike the DRE system, the ballot marking systems do not store your votes into a computer. Instead, the ballot is marked on paper and tabulated, just like other paper ballots. These systems also provide other accessibility features, such as audio.

Please note: both options create a paper trail of your vote.

On our website, you can also get much more detail on how to use the equipment.

**KEITH CASEBONNE: Let's discuss accessibility issues.**

**DANA FARMER:** It's really important to learn what the accessibility requirements are at the polling place. To learn what's required by federal law regarding accessibility, see the "Polling Place Accessibility Checklist," which is on our [AccessTheVote.org](http://AccessTheVote.org) site.

So federal and state laws require the Supervisor of Elections offices and polling places to be accessible.

If your polling place is not accessible, contact your local Supervisor of Elections.

Don't forget: if you have any issues or questions throughout your voting process, you can call our Voter Hotline at 1-800-342-0823 ext. 6000.

**KEITH CASEBONNE:** So much great information today. Here are the top 5 things that I would take away from this episode:

1. First of all, you must be registered to vote before October 11 if you want to vote in the general election.
2. There are also three different ways you can vote, and you can choose the method that works best for you.
3. Also, voters are entitled to assistance while registering to vote or voting. You do not have to disclose your disability to receive assistance.
4. All polling places must be accessible according to state and federal law and must have accessible voting equipment.
5. And of course, as always, for more information about registering to vote, how to vote, and to report any issues, such as an inaccessible polling place, visit the [AccessTheVote.org](http://AccessTheVote.org) website or contact our Voter Hotline at 1-800-342-0823 ext. 6000.

Thank you so much, Dana, for speaking with us today.

**DANA FARMER:** Thanks for having me, Keith. It was fun.

**KEITH CASEBONNE:** And thank you to everyone for listening to the "You First" podcast or reading the transcript online. Please email any feedback about the show to [podcast@disabilityrightsflorida.org](mailto:podcast@disabilityrightsflorida.org).