

# OVERCOMING



# VOTING OBSTACLES

A resource from the National Center for Transgender Equality  
January 2008

# TRANSGENDER PEOPLE CAN VOTE.

DO NOT LET ANYONE REFUSE YOUR RIGHT TO VOTE.



Everyone should vote! Unfortunately there are issues that sometimes make it difficult for trans people to vote. Don't let these barriers stop you from voting—you have a right to vote. Trans people may find voting to be an intimidating process for many reasons. Below are trans-specific reasons; on the following pages are other situations that may arise for some transgender people.

Since laws vary from state to state, remember to bring identification to the polls that will show you are the person who is registered to vote. Requirements have changed recently in some states. Check with the Secretary of State's office for further information (for more information is available at the National Association of Secretaries of State, <http://www.nass.org>).

## **YOUR NAME DOESN'T MATCH**

You may have obtained ID with a new name (legal or assumed) which does not match the name listed on the voter rolls. Trans voters should change their names on the voter registration rolls to their new name as soon as possible. Contact your local Registrar of Voters. But you should still be allowed to vote. Bring the ID necessary to show that you are the person who is registered to vote. Some possibilities include old ID cards, court orders, or physician letters.

## **YOUR PICTURE DOESN'T MATCH**

The picture (or name) displayed on your ID may no longer match your gender expression. If so, it is important for you to carry whatever identification or documentation is necessary to prove that you are the person registered to vote under that name. Some possibilities might include old ID cards, any court orders or physician letters you may have.

## **MULTIPLE ID HAS CONFLICTING INFORMATION**

While we do suggest that you bring enough ID to prove that you are the person who is registered to vote, it is not appropriate for poll workers to ask for more than that. In many places, they may only ask for ID from first-time voters. If you encounter this problem, ask for a provisional ballot and call 1-866-OUR-VOTE.

## **TRANSPHOBIA/DISCRIMINATION**

Fear of transphobia or discrimination can also play a roll in keeping trans people from voting. Many states offer early voting or absentee balloting; these methods of voting may make some trans people more comfortable. You can find information by contacting the Secretary of State in your state. You might also think about bringing a voting buddy when you go to the polls.

IF YOU ARE TOLD YOU CANNOT VOTE FOR ANY REASON, INSIST ON A PROVISIONAL BALLOT AND IMMEDIATELY CONTACT THE ELECTION PROTECTION COALITION AT 1-866-OUR-VOTE.

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## RACIAL/ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

Despite the protections granted by the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the disenfranchisement of under-represented voters has continued to be a problem for our nation. The 2000 Election spotlighted Florida’s race-based discrimination in voting practices; unfortunately discrimination based on race and ethnicity is not confined to one state.

### Resources:

- American Civil Liberties Union Voting Right, <http://www.votingrights.org/advocacy/>
- “The Long Shadow of Jim Crow: Voter Intimidation and Suppression Today”; a joint effort of People for the American Way and NAACP and provides information on race-based voter discrimination, available at <http://www.pfaw.org/pfaw/general/default.aspx?old=16368>

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## COLLEGE STUDENT VOTERS

Trans student voters may feel unwanted in both their home states and where they attend university.

The Rights of Students to vote varies from state to state, but all students 18 years old or older have a right to vote.

### Resources:

- “Not Home Not Welcome: Barriers to Student Voters,” Published by Project Democracy, <http://www.lcveducation.org/programs/polling-research/barriers-to-student-voting-rpt.html>
- Rock the Vote, Student Voter Information Guide, <http://www.rockthevote.com/faq/>
- United States Student Association. <http://www.usstudents.org>, (202) 347-8772

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## FELONY CONVICTION

Trans people who have been convicted of a felony may believe they can no longer vote. This may be true in some states, but not all.

### Resources:

- The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law provides information on the re-enfranchisement process for all 50 states <http://www.lawyer-scomm.org/> and (202) 662-8600

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## HOMELESSNESS

Homeless trans people with no physical address may believe they cannot register to vote – this is FALSE.

### Resources

- The National Coalition for the Homeless, “You Don’t Need a Home to Vote,” <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/getinvolved/projects/vote/index.html>

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## LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Language barriers may cause some trans people not to vote because they cannot read the ballot. Some states and localities with large populations of under-represented people print ballots in more than one language. Voters may also bring a friend or family member into the voting booth to aid them in casting their ballot.

### Resources:

- National Council of La Raza, <http://www.nclr.org/content/faqs/detail/27009/> (202) 785-1670

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**DISABILITY ACCESS**

Disabled trans people may not be able to cast their votes without assistance. Voters may bring a friend or family member into the voting booth to aid in casting their ballot.

Resources:

- American Association of People with Disabilities, voting information: <http://www.aapd-dc.org/dvpmain/dvpindex.php>, (800) 840-8844

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**TRANSPORTATION ISSUES**

If you need transportation to the polls on Election Day, contact the local chapter of your political party or your local Registrar of Voters.

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**LOCATING YOUR POLLING PLACE**

If you need assistance locating your polling place

Resource:

- People for the American Way has an online a polling location locator at <http://www.pfaw.org/pfaw/general/default.aspx?oid=17317>; you can also call People for the American Way at (800) 326-7329 for polling location information.

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**ADDRESS CHANGE**

It is a voter's responsibility to notify the local Registrar of Voters with any change of address status. Each state has its own laws governing change of address procedures—some states allow updates to address status as late as Election Day while others require prior notice. Your state's Office of the Secretary of State or your local Registrar of Voters can provide you with the requirements for reporting a change of address in your area.

Resource:

- Working Assets - Your Vote Matters provides a list of all 50 Secretaries of State

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**YOUR NAME IS MISSING FROM THE ROLLS**

If you arrive on Election Day and are not on the voter rolls, you should request a PROVISIONAL BALLOT. Although states are required to create provisional ballots, poll workers may not readily offer them. Do not be afraid to ask for a provisional ballot—you are legally entitled to one. If you feel that you have been incorrectly removed from the voter rolls, contact your state's Office of the Secretary of State or your local Registrar of Voters.

Resource:

- For more information on Provisional Ballots, read "Placebo Ballots: Will Fail Safe Voting Fail?", published by Demos at <http://www.demos-usa.org/pubs/HAVA%20-%20Placebo%20Ballots%20bw%20101904.pdf>

**TO REPORT DISCRIMINATION, CALL 1-866-OUR-VOTE (687-8683) IMMEDIATELY.  
THE ELECTION PROTECTION COALITION WILL HAVE ATTORNEYS READY TO HELP YOU VOTE.**

**YOUR VOTE MATTERS!**