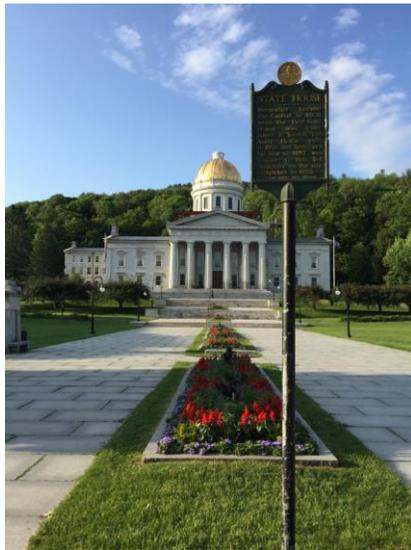




**Statewide Accessibility Survey Results of  
Vermont Polling Places  
July 2018**



**DRVT • 141 Main Street Suite 7 • Montpelier Vermont • 05602**

**[Disabilityrightsvt.org](http://Disabilityrightsvt.org)**

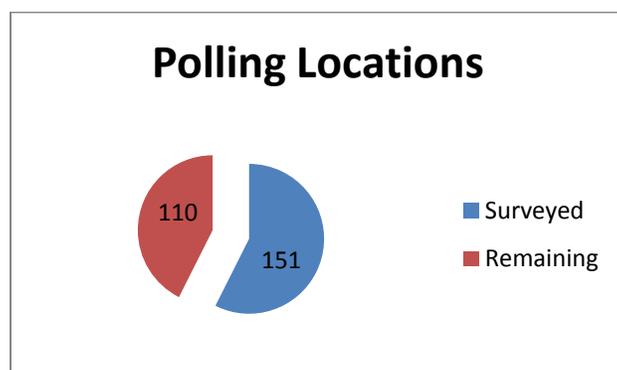
•Produced with funding from the Help America Vote Act of 2002•

## Background and Purpose:

Federal and state laws require that towns and cities make their polling places fully accessible to voters with mobility impairments, visual and other types of disabilities. Since the Americans with Disabilities Act became law in 1990, local governments have had 28 years to improve their facilities and practices to ensure the full participation of voters with disabilities.

But since 1990 there has been no independent, comprehensive evaluation including actual inspections of Vermont polling places to assess their progress in meeting the more stringent standards for voter accessibility that are now law. Over the years, there have been several limited efforts to review the accessibility of Vermont's polling places relying mostly on self-evaluation and self-reporting by polling places, with only limited follow-up by agencies or organizations familiar with the rules and practical requirements to create truly barrier-free polling places for voters with disabilities.

With funding from the federal Help America Vote Act of 2002, Disability Rights Vermont staff began a comprehensive review of Vermont polling place access, to-date having performed on-site inspections of 151 of the 261 polling places in Vermont communities to check their accessibility for voters with disabilities. This report summarizes the findings of these DRVT Polling Place Accessibility Survey (PPAS) inspections.



## **Method and Scope:**

The communities surveyed represent 57.85% of the Vermont locations where balloting takes place for general elections. Communities were selected randomly. The communities surveyed thus far are as follows:

Addison • Albany • Alburg • Andover • Arlington • Ascutney • Athens • Baltimore • Barnet • Barre City • Barton • Bennington • Benson • Berkshire • Berlin • Bradford • Brattleboro • Bridgewater • Bridport • Bristol • Brownington • Brunswick • Burlington • Canaan • Cavendish • Chelsea • Chester • Clarendon • Concord • Coventry • Craftsbury • Derby • Dorset • Dummerston • Fairfax • Fayston • Ferrisburg • Georgia • Glover • Goshen • Grafton • Grand Isle • Greensboro • Groton • Guilford • Hancock • Hartland • Highgate • Hinesburg • Hubbardton • Ira • Irasburg • Isle LaMotte • Jamaica • Jay • Jericho • Killington • Landgrove • Lemington • Lincoln • Londonderry • Ludlow • Lunenburg • Lyndon • Maidstone • Marlboro • Mendon • Middlebury • Milton • Montpelier • Moretown • Morgan • Morristown • Mount Holly • Newfane • New Haven • Newport Town • North Hero • Northfield • Norton • Norwich • Pawlet • Peru • Pittsford • Pomfret • Pownal • Putney • Richford • Reading • Readsboro • Richmond • Rochester • Rockingham • Rupert • Rutland • Ryegate • St. Albans City • St. Albans Town • St. Johnsbury • Sandgate • Searsburg • Shaftsbury • Sheffield • Sheldon • Shoreham • Shrewsbury • South Hero • Stamford • Stockbridge • Stratton • Swanton • Sunderland • Sutton • Thetford • Topsham • Townshend • Tunbridge • Underhill • Vergennes • Vernon • Vershire • Wardsboro • Warren • Waterbury • Waterford • Waterville • Waltham • Weathersfield • Westfield • Westford • Weston • West Fairlee • West Windsor • Westminster • Whitingham • Winhall • Windham • Windsor • Winooski • Wolcott • Woodford • Woodstock

Town clerks were contacted in advance to explain the process and schedule a date and time for the survey. The survey instruments used were the ADA Checklist for Polling Places by the U.S. Department of Justice, and after 2010 the ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities created by the Institute for Human Centered Design and the ADA National Network. DRVT staff used tape measures, levels and other tools to examine whether each polling place's parking, drop-off areas, sidewalks, doorways, interior hallways, and voting areas were fully accessible to ADA standards, and noted and photographed any deficiencies that were found. Individual polling place results were reported to the voting officials through a formal, written report that identified areas of non-compliance with accessibility standards and provided suggestions on how to achieve full compliance either temporarily permanently, or both.

### **Findings:**

Most Vermont polling officials surveyed have made a good faith effort to make their polling places fully accessible to voters with disabilities. Some towns were in the process of renovating their polling location to install accessibility improvements at the time of DRVT's survey. However, almost every town surveyed had at least one or two areas which were out of compliance with the ADA. The most common areas out of compliance are summarized in the "Problem Areas and Issues" section below.

### **Strengths of Towns Surveyed:**

- ▶ Most towns offer at least some parking at the polling place that is accessible (although many of these spaces do not fully meet the ADA standards).
  
- ▶ Where there is an elevation change from the parking area to the building entrance most towns have installed ramps for voters with mobility impairments.

▶ Most towns have obstacle-free and barrier-free interior corridors and hallways for voters with disabilities (for those with low vision or individuals who are blind).

▶ Town Clerks or other officials are ready to respond to voters with disabilities who need assistance.

▶ Most polling locations provide at least one if not more accessible ballot booths for voters using wheelchairs or scooters.

### **Most Common Areas not in Compliance with the ADA:**

▶ 56.95% (86) of the locations surveyed either had no designated van-accessible parking space or had non-compliant van-accessible parking spaces. [Of the accessible spaces, is at least one a van accessible space?] §§208.2.4, 505.2

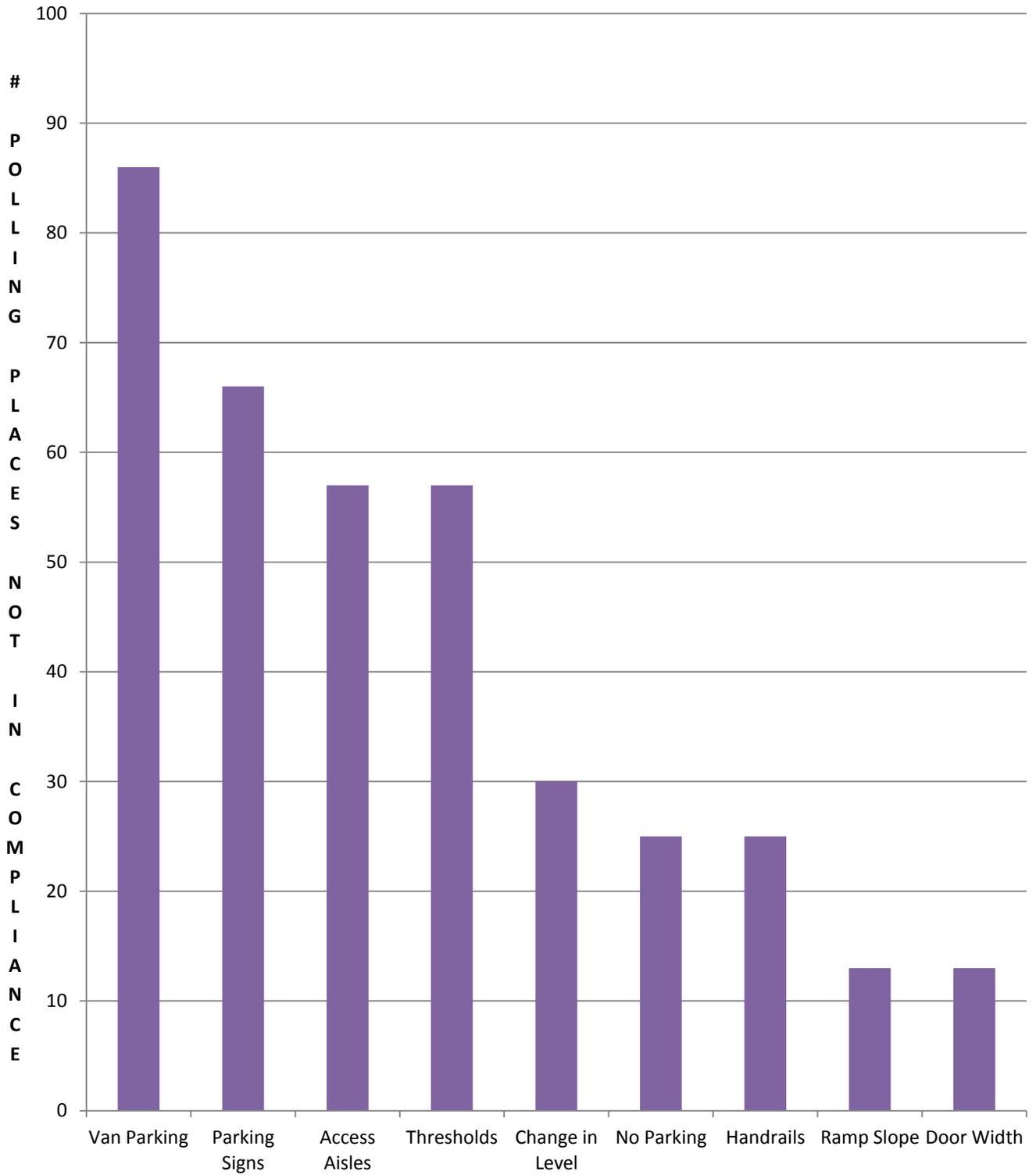
▶ 43.7% (66) of the locations surveyed either had no accessible parking signs or had non-compliant parking signs. [Are accessible spaces identified with a sign that includes the International Symbol of Accessibility and signs reading "van accessible" at van accessible spaces?] §502.6

▶ 37.74% (57) of the locations surveyed either had no access aisles or non-compliant access aisles connected to the accessible parking. [Are the access aisles marked so as to discourage parking in them?] §502.3.3

▶ 37.74% (57) of the locations surveyed had thresholds at the accessible entrance that were non-compliant. [If the threshold is vertical is it no more than ¼ inch high, or no more than ½ inch after 1991, or no more than ¾ inch before 1991?] §§404.2.5, 303.2

- ▶ 19.86% (30) of the locations surveyed had an exterior accessible route that had changes in level that were non-compliant. [Changes in level between ¼ inch high minimum and ½ inch high maximum shall be beveled with a slope not steeper than 1:2] §303.3
- ▶ 16.55% (25) of locations surveyed had no designated accessible parking spaces. [When parking is provided for the public, an adequate number of those parking spaces must be accessible parking spaces.] §208.2
- ▶ 16.55% (25) of the locations surveyed that had ramps had either no handrails or had non-compliant handrails. [If the ramp has a rise higher than 6 inches are there handrails on both sides?] §405.8
- ▶ 8.6% (13) of the locations surveyed had ramps that had non-compliant slopes. [Is the running slope no greater than 1:12?] §405.2
- ▶ 8.6% (13) of the locations surveyed had non-compliant door widths at the entrance to the polling location. [Is the clear opening width of the accessible entrance door at least 32 inches?] §404.2.3

## ADA Non-Compliance Areas



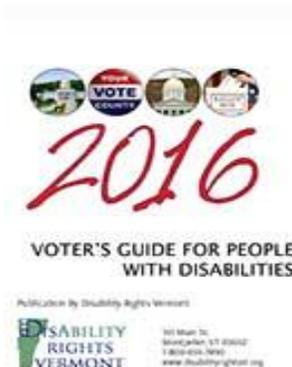
## Outcomes and Follow-Up:

Disability Rights Vermont (DRVT) has found during these surveys that the majority of town clerks were receptive to the findings and feedback that were provided and were genuinely interested in assuring compliance with the ADA. Many said that they would share these findings with their Selectboards and/or Board of Civil Authority to assist the town in planning to remedy identified barriers to voting for individuals with disabilities.

DRVT's overall goal in this project is to work with Vermont municipalities to remove the barriers that may reduce voter participation rates among Vermonter's with disabilities. DRVT believes that low voter turnout is due to many factors including physical and attitudinal barriers faced by people with disabilities to registering and voting at the polls, limited voter education efforts targeting voters with disabilities and little public awareness or discussion about the power of the disability vote.

DRVT has been working with several other Vermont disability advocacy and service providers to improve this situation. We are working to register voters with disabilities, promote their participation in the upcoming elections, and engage in other nonpartisan voter information and education work.

Since 2010 DRVT has published a *Voter's Guide for People with Disabilities* for each election cycle.



This guide is a nonpartisan guide that provides resource information and candidate information for people with disabilities and will be published following the Vermont Primary Election in August. This guide will be available on our website when it is completed at: [http://www.disabilityrightsvt.org/res\\_pub.html](http://www.disabilityrightsvt.org/res_pub.html)

DRVT plans to continue the polling place accessibility surveys until every polling location has been surveyed. Our future project goal once that is completed would be to start follow-up visits to see what progress has been made on correcting previously documented compliance issues.

Together with our partners, we will continue to work on removing all barriers to voting for people with disabilities in Vermont because every vote matters.

For more information about this work, please contact our office at 802-229-1355 or visit our website.