My Vote Counts!

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Entering adult life comes with new rights and responsibilities, regardless of whether or not you have a disability. All citizens at the age of 18 obtain the legal right to vote, including those on the autism spectrum. Many states have restrictions as to persons who are disqualified to vote based on guardianship, mental health status, or disability. Indiana is one state that does not have state laws affecting the voting right of people with disabilities.

Interestingly, about 3 million people with disabilities nationally registered to vote in 2012, but they didn’t actually vote. When you consider that the last two presidential elections were decided by less than 5 million votes, how would/could have the election outcomes been different in their states or in the United States overall if their vote had been counted? Ultimately, just as choosing to vote is a choice, choosing not to vote is a choice as well.

A question for many families with a young adult with ASD is “Is my son/daughter ready to evoke that right of voting and how do I best guide him or her for this responsibility?” Here are some items to consider:

1. Discuss the voting process with your young adult.
2. Direct them to candidates’ written information.
3. Encourage them to listen to debates or follow articles on important issues.
4. Provide them with as much information as possible to help them make an informed vote.
5. If they don’t show an interest in voting, have a discussion with them about the process so you know they have an understanding of their right to vote.

The Indiana Governor’s Council for People with Disabilities has prepared a document entitled Voting in Indiana- A Guide to Voting for Hoosiers with Disabilities. The document can be downloaded at this website: [http://www.in.gov/gpcpd/2519.htm](http://www.in.gov/gpcpd/2519.htm).
Highlights from the Voting in Indiana resource by page number are:

Page 7 – Voters Bill of Rights
- Who can vote?
- How to troubleshoot if information about you is incorrect or missing (e.g., you have recently moved and your address has not been updated, your name is not on the list, etc.)

Page 12—Step by step voting process (including information on who may assist the voter)

Page 34—Glossary of terms for voters

Page 47—Indiana election dates

Page 48—Finding out who you may be voting for, includes visual/memory aid to take with you the day you vote

Page 51—Materials list for voting day (what to bring, how to navigate the polling place, etc.)

It is important to encourage our young adults with ASD to vote. Without their vote, who will represent the autism community and advocate for their rights and needs in the future? If they do not vote as a young adult and later become parents themselves, who will be role models on the importance of voting for their children? For young adults, it is important that they vote because decisions made by legislators today can have a long term impact on their quality of life and available opportunities. Employment, environment, education, health, and other relevant issues will affect the lives of individuals with autism for years to come. If a young adult feels prepared to vote, their time to have a say is now.

References

