

Report Highlights

Feasibility of Limiting Polling Places to Handicap Accessible Schools and Government Buildings

House Resolution 332 of 2007 called on the LB&FC to assess the feasibility of limiting polling places to handicap accessible schools and government buildings. For the purposes of this study, we considered all buildings housing fire and EMS services to be government buildings.

- **All but five Pennsylvania counties report that 90-100% of their polling places are handicap accessible.** We defined a significant accessibility problem as fewer than 90% of a county’s polling places being handicap inaccessible. Only five counties qualified as having handicap accessibility problems under this criteria: Clearfield (53.5% accessible), Jefferson (48.6% accessible), Philadelphia (6.7% accessible), Washington (71.9% accessible), and Wayne (54.1% accessible).
- **Oftentimes schools and government buildings are not handicap accessible.** As shown below, in those counties where fewer than 90% of their polling places are handicap accessible, oftentimes the schools and government buildings are also not handicap accessible.

<u>County</u>	<u># School Polling Places Inaccessible</u>	<u># Government Building Polling Places Inaccessible</u>	<u># Other Polling Places Inaccessible</u>
Clearfield	0	25	10
Jefferson	0	15	7
Philadelphia	362	41	930
Wayne	0	9	8
Westmoreland	2	21	28

- **The criteria for handicap accessibility are very specific, but considerable variability exists in how the criteria are interpreted.** The Department of State lists 24 different criteria polling places must meet to be deemed handicap accessible. For example, pathways must include curb cuts or curb ramps, the route to the polling place must be free of steps, pathways must have handrails, and all slopes must be less than one inch rise for

every one foot in length. Several county officials noted that compliance with these criteria is largely self-reported and that, despite the specificity of the criteria, considerable variability exists in what counties consider as handicap accessible.

- **Several county officials report renewed efforts to achieve handicap accessibility.** Two (Jefferson and Wayne) of the five counties with less than 90% handicap accessibility reported that they have placed a priority on significantly increasing the number of handicap accessible polling places. Clearfield and Philadelphia both noted that they apply the handicap accessibility criteria strictly but, for practical purposes, most of their polling places are handicap accessible. Philadelphia, for example, indicated that although only 113 of its 1,681 polling places are “fully accessible,” all but 202 of the remaining polling places are “substantially accessible.”
- **Restricting polling places to schools and government buildings does not appear feasible because:**
 - Outside of Philadelphia, the vast majority (96%) of nongovernmental polling places are already handicap accessible.
 - Many schools and government buildings themselves are not handicap accessible.
 - None of the county elections officials we spoke to thought it feasible to limit polling places to handicap accessible schools and government buildings. Several did, however, voice support for legislation to require schools to be polling places if deemed necessary by the county.