

Navigating Traffic Stops for People with Disabilities

Background

People with disabilities are more likely than typically developing peers to have interactions with the justice system and be incarcerated. The Bureau of Justice Statistics published data in 2021 showing that 38% of prisoners had at least one disability.

<https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/disabilities-reported-prisoners-survey-prison-inmates-2016>



Preparing

- Write down the words you would want the officer to know and practice saying them.
- Go to a practice traffic stop event with The Arc of Northern Virginia or visit your local police station and ask if an officer is available to do a quick practice with you.
- If you're stopped, put your hands up. Tell the officer that you want to give them your ID and information about your disability.
- You can add details about your disability to your file with the DMV that will come up when your license/ID is run by checking that you have a disability and entering comments on the application form.
- Know your rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). You can ask for "reasonable accommodations" in interactions with police. That could be things like asking for the officer to speak more slowly, write things down, allow a support person to help you navigate answering questions, or calling an emergency contact.
- If things seem to be going poorly in a police interaction, do your best to stay calm. Ask for a CIT (Crisis Intervention Trained) Officer to come as back up and when they arrive, ask for help/accommodations.
- Make yourself a handwritten or typed card with your name, contact information, address, diagnoses, and information about your needs and communication style to hand to first responders. You can use our template at <https://thearcofnova.org/resource-library/#c-j-s>



Resources

- <https://www.youtube.com/user/VideosatTheArcofNoVA> for a series of mini-videos on navigating justice interactions for people with disabilities
- <https://thearcofnova.org/resource-library/#c-j-s> for a written guide on justice statistics, rights, resources, and ideas and a card you can customize to give to an officer
- Marcus Alert systems in your area to tag an informational profile to your address or other information at <https://www.emergencyprofile.org/>

