

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.¹ Traffic stops and other unplanned interactions with police and first responders can create tremendous stress, which can lead to misunderstandings and dangerous situations.

Preparing

There are lots of ways to prepare for a traffic stop. Preparation puts people with disabilities in a better position to safely work through these situations. If you will be a driver or passenger, here are some ways to get ready for a possible traffic stop.

- 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 along with your ID. You can use our template at <https://thearcofnova.org/resource-library/#c-j-s>
- 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.

Resources

To learn more about how to prepare for any interactions with the justice system and to see more on traffic stops, please check out these resources.

- <https://thearcofnova.org/> to ask a question of our team, including how to get more information on these kits.
- bit.ly/DisabilityJusticeVideos for a series of mini-videos on traffic stops, helping people with disabilities navigate 911 calls and police interactions, and other community resources.
- <https://thearcofnova.org/resource-library/#c-j-s> for a written guide for people with disabilities and their families on finding advocates, supportive resources, and accommodation options available to them to prevent negative interactions with the justice system and find assistance if they are arrested.
- Look into your local Marcus Alert system to enter profiles into the emergency services system at <https://emergencyprofile.org/>

¹ <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/disabilities-reported-prisoners-survey-prison-inmates-2016>

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant #90DP0089-01-00). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this document do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.