



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

**Department of
Health and Social Services**

Governor's Council on Disabilities
& Special Education

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March 14th, 2016

Representative Steve Thompson
Alaska State Legislature
Capitol Building, Room 515
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RE: HB77: Disability Training and Identification Bill

Dear Representative Thompson,

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council) would like to extend its support for HB 77. Your sponsorship of this bill is greatly appreciated as we feel that it will positively impact Alaska's most vulnerable populations, including individuals with disabilities.

Individuals with a hidden Intellectual or Developmental Disability who find themselves in a situation where it is necessary to effectively communicate with an authority figure may be at a disadvantage because of communication barriers, situational unawareness, and preconceptions authority figures may hold. Sadly, there have been instances in the past where Officers of the Law were unaware of an individual's disability and consequently misinterpreted the individual's actions as suspect and/or criminal, resulting in either injury or imprisonment for the individual. The Council feels that a training program is needed to improve communication skills between police officers, corrections officers and parole/probation officers who interact with people who experience non-apparent disabilities, whether these disabled individuals encounter the "systems" as victims, witnesses, or alleged perpetrators.

The Council strongly supports HB77 and the awareness that could potentially be fostered by providing law enforcement officials with the proper information and sensitivity training regarding individuals who experience a disability. By implementing a training course for law enforcement officials and having the option for an individual to include a discreet marker on their state identification card that conveys their disability to an Officer, the Council believes that HB77 will greatly decrease accidents that could have been prevented in the past by increasing hidden disability awareness throughout Alaska. Passing HB 77 will provide a framework for a future in which a person's hidden disability will not be interpreted as uncooperative or unlawful and will prevent needless misunderstandings that can lead to violence and arrest. Thank you for working to ensure that Alaskans with disabilities are safe and understood by the people that work hard to protect them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Patrick Reinhart".

Patrick Reinhart
Executive Director
Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education



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GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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March 22, 2016

Representative Steve Thompson
Alaska Capitol, Room 515
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Regarding: Support CSHB 77, Training Regarding Non-Apparent Disabilities & Voluntary Disability Designations on State Identification Cards and Driver's License

Dear Representative Thompson:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to renew our support for CSHB 77, as authored by you and co-sponsored by Representatives Gara, Kawasaki, Kito, Saddler, Vazquez, Lynn, Stutes, Wilson, Wool, Keller, Millett, and Neuman. Although this legislation addresses the needs of all Alaskans with disabilities, the ACoA will focus on the "safety" benefits we perceive for older Alaskans from this legislation, particularly those with concealed impairments that may result from physical or cognitive sources.

Older people who experience concealed disabilities are often impacted by the manner in which they respond to sensory stimuli and process information. This behavior can sometimes be misunderstood as resulting from being under the influence of an intoxicant or as purposefully disruptive. For example, hearing loss can result in problems understanding the spoken language and performing complex tasks. Those with anxiety disorders have a tendency to selectively focus and interpret even ambiguous events in a highly threatening way – which can be observed as disruptive behavior. Wandering outside unattended and unprotected is a significant personal safety risk for persons living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Drivers with early stage memory changes are especially likely to minimize the complexity of driving and overestimate their abilities that can lead to unsafe driving. They may also find themselves lost even in familiar surroundings due to diminished short-term memory. Not only do these disabling conditions affect personal safety and the safety of others nearby, but may also impact the outcome of an encounter between a person with a disability and a public safety officer.

The Commission strongly agrees that preserving personal safety and dignity of individuals with disabilities would be greatly improved by having trained public safety officials able to recognize the signs of a person with a disability and have the skills to respond appropriately to them. We greatly appreciate the new requirement as proposed by CSHB 77 for the Alaska Police Standards Council to amend its training curriculum requirements to include training that will enable Alaska police officers, correctional officers, probation officers, and parole officers to recognize people with disabilities, including disabilities that are hidden, to know how to respond appropriately, and possess knowledge about relevant resources that can provide assistance. Disability awareness training will advance use of the "Silver Alert"

system and promote greater awareness among public safety officers about the needs of Alaskans with Alzheimer's disease and other cognitive impairments who have a tendency to wander and become lost, sometimes finding themselves in life-threatening situations. Public safety officers trained in disability awareness will be better able to recognize the signs of a person with dementia in the community and respond appropriately to bring that person to safety.

We thank you for your leadership on CSHB 77 to enhance public safety awareness, improve communication, and increase protection for Alaskans with disabilities.

Sincerely,



Mary E. Shields

Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello

ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Representative Les Gara
Representative Scott Kawasaki
Representative Sam Kito
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative Liz Vazquez
Representative Charisse Millett

Representative Bob Lynn
Representative Louise Stutes
Representative Tammie Wilson
Representative Adam Wool
Representative Wes Keller
Representative Mark Neuman

Dear Representative Thompson,

Thank you for sponsoring HB77, the Disability Training and ID Bill. I strongly support HB77 because this bill will make sure that law enforcement professionals will be educated about disabilities and how a disability affects a person's everyday life. These professionals will become better equipped to interact with people who experience either an apparent or non-apparent disability.

I also support HB77 because it will enable people who experience a disability to voluntarily have a discreet marker placed on an Alaska Driver's License or ID card. This marker will help a professional recognize that the person in front of them has a disability, even though it may not be initially apparent to the professional.

I am a Wallbuster and have been working with other Wallbuster's and your office from the beginning on this legislation. I have always believed in its importance and need but in 2014 had a personal experience that really brought the reality of the changes that needed to be made to my own doorstep. It became very apparent to me the need for additional training for law enforcement and how they interact with people with disabilities, especially non apparent disabilities. Because of a domestic issues state troopers were called to our home in 2014 in the middle of the night. I told the 911 operator that my husband was legally blind and repeated the same thing to the two troopers that responded to the call and came to our home. At no time did the officers acknowledge my information or ask or act in any way to show they understood how this disability would affect the way they communicated with my husband during the event that took place. I believe the interaction had a potential to become explosive due to this lack of understanding/action.

I believe this bill legislation will go a long way toward safer encounters between people with disabilities and law enforcement. The training will help officers better understand and safeguard the right of people with disabilities. HB77 will help improve the lives of Alaskans with both apparent and non-apparent disabilities and improve the quality of law enforcement officers throughout the state.

Again, thank you for your support,

Juanita Webb

Dear Representative Thompson,

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Again, thank you for your support,

I support the creation of this legislation in defense of citizens inflicted with a variety of hidden disabilities. I hope it will also increase awareness and understanding of the occasional special circumstance those with disabilities, obvious or not, must contend. Thank you for supporting HB77.

Franky Rön 2-19-15

Training in recognizing non-apparent disabilities.

Provide training that instructs peace officers in the recognition of a person with a non-apparent disability and appropriate interaction with a person with a non-apparent disability.

Stress positive responses to such individuals, de-escalating potentially dangerous situations, and understanding of the different manner in which such individuals' process sensory stimuli and language, and appropriate methods of interrogation. **Where appropriate, the training presenters shall include experts on non-apparent disabilities.**

Techniques for differentiating between an individual with a non-apparent disability from an individual who is belligerent, uncooperative, or otherwise displaying traits similar to the characteristics of an individual with a non-apparent disability.

Some Non Apparent disabilities:

Cognitive:

Autism, FASD, Intellectual Disability, Aspergers, etc.

Mayhave/be:

- Limited vocabulary
- Difficulty understanding/answering questions
- Mimics answers/responses
- Unable to communicate events clearly in his/her own words
- Unable to understand complicated instructions or abstract concepts
- Not understand consequences of situations
- Unaware of seriousness of situations
- Easily led or persuaded by others
- Naïve eagerness to confess or please authority figures
- Unaware of social norms and appropriate social behavior
- Acts younger than actual age, may display childlike behavior
- Displays low frustration tolerance and/or poor impulse control
- "Act out", become emotional, or try to leave if under pressure
- Difficulty performing tasks
- Inability to read or write
- Inability to tell time
- Difficulty staying focused and easily distracted
- Awkward/poor motor coordination
- Difficulty recalling facts/details
- Impulsive actions (try to run, fight, etc.)
- Over-willing to confess
- Hides disability
- Says what others want to hear
- Frustration

- Not make eye contact. Don't misinterpret limited eye contact as deceit.
- Not talk (nonverbal).
- Communicate with sign language, picture cards or gestures
- Have a delayed response to your question.
- May be prone to seizures.
- Exhibit odd behaviors such as flapping hands or pacing. Don't try to stop these behaviors which may be the person's way of calming him/her

Traumatic or Acquired Brain Injury (TABI)

- Caused by external forces or internal events that impair physical, neurological, psychological, intellectual, emotional, and behavioral functioning.
- Changes following a brain injury can affect how the person experiences life, interprets events and responds behaviorally.
- Has trouble processing or remembering information, may not follow instructions and may be perceived as belligerent or unmotivated.
- Experiences headaches and fatigue, level of frustration tolerance may be low causing them to act out in anger.
- Has difficulty perceiving how their behavior affects others, important relationships can become strained.
- Has difficulty with impulsivity, he may do or say things that are not always socially appropriate (e.g. sexual acting out).
- Experiences emotional volatility, he may have outbursts of anger, aggression, or crying.

Mental Health

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Verbal Cues

Illogical thoughts
 Sharing a combination of unrelated or abstract topics
 Expressing thoughts of greatness
 Indicating ideas of being harassed or threatened
 Exhibiting a preoccupation with death, germs, guilt, or other similar ideas
 Unusual speech patterns
 Nonsensical speech or chatter
 Word repetition
 Pressured speech
 Extremely slow speaking
 Verbal hostility or excitement
 Talking excitedly or loudly
 Being argumentative, belligerent, or unreasonably hostile
 Threatening harm to self or others

Behavioral Cues

Physical appearance
Inappropriate to environment
Bizarre clothing or makeup (taking into account current trends)
Bodily movements
Strange postures or mannerisms
Lethargic, sluggish movements
Pacing, agitation
Repetitive, ritualistic movements
Seeing, smelling, or hearing things that cannot be confirmed
Confusion about or unawareness of surroundings
Lack of emotional response
Causing injury to self
Nonverbal expressions of sadness or grief
Inappropriate emotional reactions
Overreacting to situations in an overly angry or frightening way
Reacting with the opposite of expected emotion

Environmental Cues

Decorations-Strange trimmings, misuse of household items
Waste matter/trash
“Packratting” – accumulation of trash
Presence of feces or urine on the floor or walls
Childish objects

Posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, can occur after someone goes through, sees, or learns about a traumatic event:

- feel tense or afraid
- be agitated and jumpy
- feel on alert
- overreact to small misunderstandings
- drink, use drugs, or smoke too much
- drive aggressively
- avoid certain people or situations
- hyper vigilance, or a heightened awareness of external stimuli like police lights or sirens

