

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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REPRESENTATIVE STEVE THOMPSON

DISTRICT 3

Sponsor Statement House Bill 232

“An Act relating to a voluntary disability designation on a state identification card and a driver’s license; and relating to training in recognizing disabilities.”

The purpose of this HB 232 is to implement a voluntary statewide identification system where a discrete marker would be placed on an Alaska Driver’s license or an Alaska ID card. This program would benefit both individuals with a hidden disability and officials with whom they interact. The marker would identify the individual as having a hidden disability, allowing a person in authority to better understand and more appropriately interact with the individual.

This bill also has a required training component. Training would be provided to Peace Officers, Court Officials and Emergency First responders instructing these professionals on how to appropriately interact with individuals diagnosed with hidden disabilities.

Many times law enforcement and first responders have to make difficult decisions on short notice and rely on tried and tested protocols, their own common sense, and a system of beliefs about human nature and behavior. When people with hidden disabilities interact with law enforcement and first responders, elements of their disabilities brush against these protocols and beliefs and may result in serious misunderstanding or even tragedy.

If a person’s disability is not recognized during an encounter, it may affect the outcome of that encounter. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that police provide “reasonable accommodations” to people with disabilities, but without the ability to confirm that a person has a disability those accommodations may not be provided.

In criminal justice situations, people with hidden disabilities may not fully understand the seriousness or consequences of their actions or fully understand their rights. People with cognitive or intellectual disabilities inclusive of veterans with PTSD or traumatic brain injuries are more likely to be arrested, convicted, sentenced to prison, and victimized in prison (Santamour, 1986). Once in the criminal justice system, these individuals tend to serve longer sentences due to an inability to understand or adapt to prison structures.

The goal of the program is to improve communication between justice professionals, law enforcement professionals, emergency responders and other agencies who may interact with people who have hidden disabilities, whether these disabled individuals encounter the “systems” as victims, witnesses, or alleged perpetrators.

Please join me in supporting HB 232.

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