



THE STATE
of ALASKA
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of
Health and Social Services

Governor's Council on Disabilities
& Special Education

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January 20th, 2017

Representative Steve Thompson
Alaska State Legislature
Capitol Building, Room 500
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RE: HB16: Disability Training and Identification Bill

Dear Representative Steve Thompson,

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council) would like to extend its support for HB16. 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 HB16 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 HB16 will greatly decrease accidents that could have been prevented in the past by increasing hidden disability awareness throughout Alaska. Passing HB16 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

1841 Chelton Lane
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709
January 17, 2017

Representative Steve Thompson
State Capitol Room 515
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Representative Thompson,

I wholly support House Bill 16, the Disability Training and ID bill. HB16 will help police officers, corrections officers and parole/probation officers to better interact with people who experience non-apparent or hidden disabilities. Without the appropriate amount of disability awareness training for police, an officer might misinterpret actions or intentions a person with a disability. This misinterpretation may result in an error that could ultimately make the difference between life and death. Even lacking a life threatening situation, a person with a disability may be treated inappropriately and his or her American with Disability (ADA) rights may be violated.

Communicating reasonable and effectively with a person experiencing a disability is the law. Title II of the (ADA) affects the core activities of law enforcement. Nothing in Title II, its regulations, or its legislative history suggests that any police activities are excluded from Title II coverage. Every time a law enforcement or corrections officer violates a person's rights under the ADA, the local or state government is liable and may be subject to litigation.

HB16 targets Title II of the ADA; specifically communication access rights. People with disabilities have the right to understand what is being said to them, be able to ask for clarification, have their information understood by the other person and be treated with respect. Training law enforcement officers is not only the law it is the right thing to do. A trained officer makes the situation safer for both the officer and the individual with whom they are interacting.

I support this bill because one of the goals of the bill is to provide training that helps law enforcement and corrections officers to intervene in a way that is helpful, respectful and more sensitive to an individual's disability. Thank you for your hard work and your efforts to sponsor and promote the passage of House Bill 16.

Very Sincerely



Art Delaune.

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