

To: Members of the Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Mental Health
From: Disability Rights Wisconsin
Date: October 24, 2017
Re: 2017 Assembly Bill 517

Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) is the statewide protection and advocacy system for children and adults with disabilities in Wisconsin. DRW provides testimony for information only today. We thank Representative Quinn's and Senator Testin's staff for meeting with us and other disability advocates to discuss the bill draft. We also thank the Committee for holding this hearing today and for considering the important issue of people with disabilities and law enforcement. People with disabilities are approximately three times more likely to be victims of violent crimes than people without disabilities.¹ This statistic highlights the importance for law enforcement to have training on how to work with and understand people with intellectual, physical, and psychiatric disabilities.

DRW supports choice for people with disabilities. 2017 AB 517 allows people with disabilities the choice of self-disclosing a disability that may not be readily apparent to law enforcement and allows the individual to alert law enforcement about certain behaviors that could be misinterpreted without knowledge that the individual has a disability. It is purposely a voluntary disclosure of a disability as we also want to protect the privacy of individuals with a disability. This disclosure is not printed directly on the license or identification card itself but only available when requested by law enforcement or other appropriate person (as determined by WI DOT). We know that some people with disabilities may have an increased sense of safety and security in their interactions with law enforcement by disclosing this information.

We want to help law enforcement in their ability to best identify that a person has a disability as soon as possible in their interaction and to have the training necessary on how to interact with that individual or how to use that information. Identifying a disability and certain behaviors through this method is only the first step in making sure that the rights and lives of people with disabilities are protected. We would ask Committee members to consider situations in which law enforcement, due to the nature of the situation, does not have time or the opportunity to run an individual's license or identification card. Additionally, without required training of law enforcement on how to interact with that individual or how to use that information regarding the disability, some people with disabilities may fear disclosing a disability and certain behaviors.

As the protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities, again, we want to provide people with choice. We also want to impart that there isn't one strategy to assist law enforcement in their interactions with people with disabilities. We are available to continue the dialogue on how we can make sure that the rights and lives of people with disabilities are protected and that law enforcement has the training and information necessary to do their jobs in our communities. Thank you for your consideration.

¹ <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=4884>

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