

# California State Senate

SENATOR  
JOHN LAIRD

SEVENTEENTH SENATE DISTRICT



## Senate Bill 1285 – Optional Disability Identifier for State Issued IDs

### **SUMMARY**

Senate Bill 1285 will allow individuals with cognitive and neurological disabilities, mental health disorders, sensory and communication needs, and chronic and physical disabilities to voluntarily opt-in to obtain a state issued identification card with a disability identifier.

### **BACKGROUND**

Research shows that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health conditions encounter law enforcement, experience increased use of force, and suffer injuries at significantly higher rates than the general public. What's more, it is estimated that as many as one-third to one half of all people killed by law enforcement have a disability.<sup>1</sup>

Misunderstanding is one factor in why interactions between those with disabilities and law enforcement can escalate. For example, a person with an intellectual or developmental disability may not process an officer's commands and appear to be noncompliant. Misunderstanding of disabilities are not limited to major police encounters but also occur in everyday life. Some examples are getting accessible parking and other privileges for people with disabilities. For those with non-apparent disabilities, the emotional pain of people questioning the legitimacy of a disability can hurt more than the medical condition itself.

By providing the opportunity for a person to voluntarily designate on their driver's license or

identification card a discreet symbol that identifies a person with a medically verified cognitive, mental, neurological, or physical disability or combination, this can help provide recognition of a disability and the possible need for reasonable accommodations in numerous situations. For example, an identifier can alert law enforcement and first responders to a person's non-apparent disability (commonly referred to as invisible disabilities) during routine contact. As individuals may have difficulty following instructions, commands, statements, or questions, this information presented to law enforcement can foster awareness, and help make these interactions safer for everyone.

Disability identifiers are not a new phenomenon. Medical ID bracelets, wallet cards, and lanyards are already used to communicate special needs. In creating a state-issued identifier, this bill creates another option for those with eligible disabilities, like communication impediments, sensory issues, hearing loss, dementia, autism, schizophrenia, and others. Additional states taking action on voluntary license identifiers include Alaska, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Utah, and Washington.

### **THIS BILL**

Senate Bill 1285 will provide individuals the option to request a state issued ID that has a discrete disability identifier.

<sup>1</sup> [https://cpcidd.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Voluntary-License-Identifier-Policy-Brief\\_Aug2023-1.pdf](https://cpcidd.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Voluntary-License-Identifier-Policy-Brief_Aug2023-1.pdf)