

OVERVIEW:

Around the country, policing agencies are working to improve relationships with the disability community, whose members are more likely to be misunderstood, injured, or even killed during law enforcement interactions. One solution being proposed by law enforcement, disability advocates, and others that continues to grow in popularity is the creation of registries.



Registries are databases that contain personal information about individuals with disabilities, such as diagnoses or communication preferences. In some jurisdictions, this information is provided to law enforcement when they receive service calls or review identification cards with flagged addresses, such as those where individuals with disabilities live. Registries can be called a variety of names and can be created in a variety of ways, including by state legislation, by for-profit companies, or by policing agencies themselves.

The intended purpose of registries is to help law enforcement officers respond more effectively to situations involving individuals with disabilities.

DESPITE THEIR GROWING POPULARITY, THERE IS CURRENTLY NO RESEARCH OR EVIDENCE THAT REGISTRIES IMPROVE POLICE RESPONSES TO THOSE WITH DISABILITIES.

In fact, there are many unintended consequences that law enforcement agencies and others must keep in mind when considering starting a registry program in their own communities, including violations of privacy and increased stigma toward people with disabilities.

WHAT LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES NEED TO KNOW:



Registries do not fulfill law enforcement's legal obligations toward the disability community.

When interacting with individuals with disabilities, law enforcement officers generally have two obligations:

1. Ensure effective communication.
2. Provide reasonable modifications to existing policies, practices, and procedures.



Effective communication means providing the same level of communication as officers would with someone without a disability (e.g., using an ASL interpreter with someone who is Deaf).



Providing **reasonable modifications** means ensuring that individuals with disabilities have the same access to policing services and activities as someone without a disability (e.g., modifying an agency's handcuffing policy when arresting someone with a physical disability).

In some jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies are required to provide continual training to officers on the topic of disability.



Registries will never be a substitute for effective training and strong, community partnerships.

In addition to law enforcement's legal obligations, many experts agree that relationship-building and partnerships at the community level go a long way in improving police-civilian interactions and building trust. In some communities, disability organizations are working directly with law enforcement agencies to establish mutually beneficial relationships, including training opportunities. Continual, comprehensive training is key to ensuring officers have the information and skills they need to interact effectively with those with disabilities.



Registries can contain outdated, misleading, or inaccurate information.

Like any other electronic or paper record, the information a registry contains must be updated regularly to be useful. In some cases, inaccurate information is being entered into registries by a variety of actors, including family members, or the information becomes less accurate over time. It is also not uncommon for people to have more than one disability, which means they can have multiple diagnoses. Long lists of clinical diagnoses in a registry can be confusing to responding officers, who often do not know how to use this information or what to do during an interaction.



Registries may inadvertently increase officer bias against people with disabilities, especially those with other marginalized identities.

If officers know a person has a disability when responding to a service call or flagged address, they may overreact in situations, or act in a way that is more biased than if they had not known the person had a disability. For example, officers may react with fear to certain diagnoses based on societal stereotypes and be more likely to use force. Biases can be both implicit (i.e., the person is unaware of their bias but still acts in a biased way) and explicit (i.e., the person is aware of their bias and acts accordingly). Registries may also reinforce broader stereotypes about the disability community (e.g., that persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities are “child-like” and in need of protection) and other marginalized communities, including people of color, members of indigenous communities, and those who identify as LGBTQIA+.



Registries may create a false sense of security for officers and community members alike.

Simply having information about someone's disability does not guarantee that an officer will act on that information or know what to do with the information during an encounter. In other words, registries are not foolproof. In many communities, only a handful of eligible people are listed on the registry, meaning the majority of people with disabilities officers encounter will not be, which diminishes registries' overall usefulness in the first place.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION:

If your agency is considering a registry for individuals with disabilities, please reach out to these disability resources in your community for further information:

[Chapters of The Arc](#)

The Arc has over 600 state and local chapters that may be able to assist your agency with training or information about people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Chapters of The Arc also have connections to other state and local disability organizations, including groups led by individuals with disabilities.

[Protection and Advocacy Agencies \(P&As\)](#)

P&As are federally-funded organizations that provide advocacy to persons with all kinds of disabilities. There is a P&A in every state and territory. P&As can help your agency learn about your legal obligations toward the disability community and general information about various types of disabilities.

For further training and technical assistance, please contact [The Arc's National Center on Criminal Justice & Disability® \(NCCJD®\)](#) and learn more about [NCCJD's Pathways to Justice® Program](#).
Email us at nccjinfo@thearc.org.