

BACKGROUND

In the wake of high profile killings of Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement officers, there are growing calls for federal legislation with policy changes to prevent future unnecessary deaths and injuries. All data shows that people of color are disproportionately impacted by negative interactions with police, at times ending in death. When disability intersects with other factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, it increases marginalization, and can increase risk of violence. The specific needs of people with disabilities cannot be left out of criminal justice reform.

ISSUES

Inadequate data: There are a startling number of unreported injuries and deaths inflicted by law enforcement and even those that are reported are unclear. The data on violence [injury and death] against people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) is scarce and almost non-existent even though people with disabilities make up one-third to one-half of people injured or killed by law enforcement. The last reported data on crimes against people with disabilities was gathered in 2015 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, leaving a six-year gap in information. Additionally, there is inconsistency in the data reported and a lack of awareness of people with autism, IDD, mental health conditions, and people with other disabilities who are injured or killed by law enforcement. Most importantly, it raises the question of why these numbers are not reported nationally.

Overburdened 9-1-1 system: Police are being asked to do more than they are trained for. Federal policies should include provisions to divert non-criminal, non-fire, and non-medical emergency calls from 9-1-1 systems to state and regional systems that can respond to mental health crises. These systems should include and be overseen by advisory councils that include people with disabilities.

Lack of training: These injuries and deaths are often the result of inconsistent or a complete lack of training and could have been avoided if

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FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

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Association of University Centers on Disabilities at (301) 588-8252 • Autism Society at (301) 657-0881
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities at (202) 506-5813
National Down Syndrome Congress at (770) 604-9500 • Self Advocates Becoming Empowered at SABEnation@gmail.com
TASH at (202) 817-3264 • The Arc at (800) 433-5255 • United Cerebral Palsy at 800-872-5827

appropriate individuals were trained on the behavioral and social challenges that coincide with disabilities. There is a desperate need for mandated training for law enforcement on how to communicate, engage, de-escalate, and respond to people with autism, IDD, and other disabilities. This training should involve people with disabilities and be directed to both new and veteran officers.

WHAT SHOULD CONGRESS DO?

1. Pass legislation to address the high incidence rate of police violence involving people with disabilities.
2. Pass legislation to collect data on police interactions with people with disabilities disaggregated by type of disability to help inform future policy adjustments.
3. Legislation should authorize ongoing mandated training of police and other first responders to help them understand how to communicate, engage, de-escalate, and respond to people with autism, IDD, and other disabilities.
4. Pass legislation that includes provisions to divert non-criminal, non-fire, and non-medical emergency calls from 9-1-1 systems to state and regional systems that can respond to mental health crises and other non-criminal requests.