



SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

Chairman Bob Casey

The Safe Interactions Act (SIA)

Why do we need the Safe Interactions Act?

Law enforcement officers must be prepared for interactions with people with disabilities, yet, the training they receive is often minimal and varies greatly by agency, state, and region. The limited available research has found that people with disabilities are more than two and a half times more likely to be victims of a crime and three times as likely to be victims of a serious crime as people without a disability. These occurrences of crime victimization lead them to have an increased number of interactions with law enforcement officers, who may be unprepared or lack knowledge about the best approach to communicate with people with different disabilities. Sadly, these interactions can end fatally. A [report](#) from the Ruderman Family Foundation found that people with disabilities make up between one-third and one-half of all people shot by law enforcement officers in 2015. These findings further demonstrate the need for increased and continued training to protect both law enforcement officers and the communities they serve.

What will the Safe Interactions Act do?

The Safe Interactions Act provides grants to enable nonprofit disability organizations to form partnerships with a law enforcement agency or agencies, to develop training programs that support the safe interactions between law enforcement officers and people with diverse disabilities by increasing the understanding of different disability types among new and veteran law enforcement officers. Preference will be given to applicants with partnerships that will train law enforcement officers in rural communities and include racial and ethnic minorities and black, indigenous, people of color in the trainings.

The Act would require:

- Partnerships between a nonprofit disability organization and law enforcement agencies.
- Inclusion of self-advocates in the development and implementation of trainings, including a diverse group of disability types such as intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health disabilities, and sensory and/or physical disabilities.
- A minimum of eight hours of training for new law enforcement officers, including four hours of interactive sessions led by trainers with disabilities, and at least four hours of training every year for existing law enforcement officers.
- The establishment of an advisory council, chaired by a person with a disability, to oversee the training program development and implementation.

Cosponsors: Senators **Moran**, Merkley, Hirono, Duckworth, Gillibrand, Menendez, Blumenthal

Supporting Organizations

Fraternal Order of Police, United Way Worldwide, the ARC of the United States, National Disability Rights Network, National Federation of the Blind, Autism Society of America, Association of Rural Independent Living Programs, National Association of the Deaf, TASH, ACHIEVA, American Network of Community Options and Resources, National Down Syndrome Congress, A.J. Drexel Autism Institute, Autism Connection of Pennsylvania, Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association of Pennsylvania



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Section I – Short Title

Safe Interactions Act of 2021

Section II – Findings

1. People with disabilities are 2.5 times more likely to be victims of violent crime.
2. People with disabilities are 3 times more likely to be victims of serious crime.
3. People with disabilities make up between one-third and one-half of all people killed by law enforcement officers.

Section III – Purposes

To provide funding to nonprofit disability organizations to partner with law enforcement agencies to administer enhanced training programs to law enforcement officers about interactions with people with disabilities. The trainings will:

- a. Increase the awareness, knowledge and understanding of law enforcement officers about people with disabilities and their needs in order to reduce instances of violence between law enforcement officers and members of the disability community.
- b. Expand the knowledge of law enforcement officers to be aware of the possibility a person may have a disability and to provide personnel with effective ways to interact with people with disabilities to maximize their safety and minimize situations of risk for all parties involved.
- c. Increase the knowledge of law enforcement officers of community resources available for people with disabilities to reduce the need for law enforcement personnel to address non-law enforcement needs.

Section IV – Definitions

Provides definitions for eligible entities, covered individuals, initial training program and refresher training program.

Section V – Grant Program

Section 5a – The Secretary of Health and Human Services will Oversee Grant Funds for the Act

The Secretary of Health and Human Services will award grants to nonprofit disability organizations to conduct training programs for law enforcement personnel who interact with people with disabilities.

Section 5b – Guidelines for Applications

Eligible entities must form a relationship with a law enforcement agency to receive funds and develop and deliver the training program. Applications must also describe the training with a timeline for completion and show expertise in trainings regarding identifying, approaching, interacting and communicating with people with disabilities.

Section 5c – Prioritization of Geographic Diversity and Rural Locations

Grant awards will prioritize geographic diversity of recipients, particularly those that serve rural localities, racial and ethnic diversity, including those that serve black, indigenous, people of color with disabilities and have them represented in their leadership, and the inclusion of multiple levels of law enforcement in trainings.

Section 5d – Use of Funds

Funds must be used to modify existing trainings for new law enforcement officers to provide a minimum of eight hours of training, with at least four hours taught by a person with a disability. Funds must also be used to provide additional annual trainings of at least four hours to existing law enforcement officers.

Section 5e – Supplement, not Supplant

Funds cannot be used in place of existing funds that are designated for law enforcement trainings.

Section 5f – Establishment of an Advisory Council

Grant recipients must establish an advisory council to oversee grant activities, including program development, sustainability and expansion. The councils must be chaired by a person with a disability, vice-chaired by a member of a law enforcement agency, and be composed of representatives of community and state organizations that serve people with disabilities.

Section 5g – Annual Report

Recipients must submit annual reports on the number of individuals trained and the number of people affected by the trainings, including demographic data on law enforcement officers trained and partner agencies involved.

Section 5h – Evaluation

Up to 2% of funds may be used for administration and external evaluation of the program.

Section VI – Authorization for Appropriations

\$100,000,000 is allocated for grant activities in each fiscal year 2022 through 2025.

If you would like more information on the Safe Interactions Act please contact Christian Clesi (Christian_Clesi@aging.senate.gov) or Michael Gamel-McCormick (Michael_Gamel-McCormick@aging.senate.gov) in Senator Casey's office or Garrison Holmberg (Garrison_Holmberg@moran.senate.gov) in Senator Moran's office.