

# Navigating Police Interactions for People with Disabilities

## Background

People with disabilities are more likely than typically developing peers to have interactions with the justice system and be incarcerated. The Bureau of Justice Statistics published data in 2021 showing that 38% of prisoners had at least one disability.

<https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/disabilities-reported-prisoners-survey-prison-inmates-2016>



## Preparing

- Write down the words you would want the officer to know and practice saying them. You may want to share your diagnosis and communication style.
- If you see an officer on the street, stop them and tell them you have a disability and would like to practice having a conversation. You can go to your local police precinct and do this, too.
- Say hi to officers on the street. They can get familiar with you and you can get comfortable talking to them.
- Set up a profile with your local Marcus Alert system so first responders know about you and your needs.
- Know your rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). You can ask for “reasonable accommodations” in interactions with police. That could be things like asking for the officer to speak more slowly, write things down, allow someone to help you answer questions, or calling an emergency contact. If things seem to be going poorly in a police interaction, do your best to stay calm. Ask for a CIT (Crisis Intervention Trained) Officer to come as back up and when they arrive, ask for help/accommodations.
- Make yourself a handwritten or typed card with your name, contact information, address, diagnoses, and information about your needs and communication style to hand to first responders. You can use our template at <https://thearcofnova.org/programs-services/library/#c-j-s>



## Resources

<https://www.youtube.com/user/VideosatTheArcofNoVA> for a series of mini-videos on navigating justice interactions for people with disabilities

- <https://thearcofnova.org/programs-services/library/#c-j-s> for a written guide on justice statistics, rights, resources, and ideas and a card you can customize to give to an officer
- Marcus Alert systems in your area to tag an informational profile to your address or other information (will be available throughout Virginia by 2022)

