

A Message from
ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL

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"to protect and to serve"

As a law enforcement officer, you have pledged yourself to ensuring the safety of Illinois residents. While carrying out this important work, you may be faced with unique issues when interacting with people who are blind or have low vision as victims, perpetrators and witnesses.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), people who are blind or have low vision are entitled to the same services law enforcement provides to anyone else. They may not be excluded or segregated from services, denied services or otherwise treated differently than other people. Law enforcement agencies, therefore, are required to make reasonable modifications to policies, practices and procedures as needed to accommodate people with visual disabilities. To guarantee their rights, people with visual disabilities must also be provided with effective assistance and information in accessible formats.

I commend you for your continued work to safeguard Illinoisans and hope that you find the information in this brochure helpful as you address crimes involving people who are blind or have low vision.

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Law Enforcement Guide to Interacting with People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision



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The Rights of People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

It is important for law enforcement officers to respect the rights of people who have visual disabilities. Some of these rights include:

- The right to have printed materials provided in an alternate format, including large print, email, compact disc, flash drive and Braille, upon request. An individual with a visual disability may also have a right to other auxiliary aids and services.
- The right to reasonable modifications in policies, practices and procedures.

Tips for Positive and Effective Interactions with People with Visual Disabilities

- Initiate contact and identify yourself.
 - ♦ Introduce yourself immediately as a law enforcement officer and have others present introduce themselves as well.
 - ♦ Offer your name, your badge number and the telephone number of your dispatcher, and support the individual in verifying your identity.
- Avoid lapses in conversation during interviews and explain any periods of silence.
- Express attentiveness, concern and compassion through your voice and choice of words.
- Offer to fill out forms and read written information aloud. Be sure to explain all printed materials and make those materials available in alternate format upon request.

- Verbally orient individuals to their surroundings. For example, state that the restroom is the third door on the right. It also may be helpful to provide directions based on the orientation of a clock (e.g., the service counter is at 3 o'clock).
- Announce when you are leaving so the person knows the conversation has ended.
- Do not label or define people by their disability. For example, refer to the person as “a woman who is blind” rather than “a blind woman.”
- Pay attention to your tone and refrain from speaking loudly. Most people who are blind or have low vision hear well.

The Rights of People Who Use Service Animals

Many people with visual disabilities have service animals, which the Americans With Disabilities Act defines as any dog individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability. In certain circumstances, public accommodations must also permit the use of a miniature horse. Both service animals and their companions have important rights:

- The Illinois White Cane Law and Service Animal Access Act guarantee the right of a person with a disability or a service animal trainer to be accompanied by a service animal or service animal in training in any public accommodation, including restaurants, stores, medical facilities and hotels.

The violation of either of these laws is a misdemeanor.

- In Illinois it is illegal to abuse or kill service animals. A person with a service animal may recover civil penalties if someone injures or in any way impairs the ability of the service animal to provide its services.

Tips for Positive and Effective Interactions Involving Service Animals

When interacting with someone who uses a service animal, remember these basic guidelines:

- Never pet a service animal without permission.
- Service animals are working animals, not pets. Service animals are specifically trained to perform certain tasks and are also bred and trained to be socialized and non-aggressive.
- Service animals may not be excluded or segregated from areas of a facility open to the public.
- Service animals must receive the same protection and respect as their companions.

Important Laws Protecting People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

- Americans With Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.
- Illinois Human Rights Act, 775 ILCS 5/1
- Service Animal Access Act, 720 ILCS 5/48-8
- Illinois White Cane Law, 775 ILCS 30
- Humane Care for Animals Act, 510 ILCS 70/4.03
- Assistance Animal Damages Act, 740 ILCS 13/10
- Illinois Vehicle Code – Pedestrian Right-of-Way, 625 ILCS 5/1-177