

Legislation Text

File #: 210523, **Version:** 0

Calling upon the Congress of the United States to enact the Law Enforcement Education and Accountability for People with Disabilities Initiative, bipartisan policing reform bills to address the high incidence rate of violence involving people with disabilities, offered by Senator Bob Casey.

WHEREAS, People with disabilities are more likely to be the victim of crime, which leads to more interactions with law enforcement officers; and

WHEREAS, 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; and

WHEREAS, A federal divestment from social services and supports has led to more of the responsibility for government interaction with people in need falling to local law enforcement officers, who may be unprepared or lack knowledge about the best approach to communicate with people with different disabilities; and

WHEREAS, The number of people with disabilities experiencing violence and shootings when interacting with law enforcement is also increasing, with at least 25 percent of shootings involve a person with a mental health disability estimated by a Washington Post database of police shootings, and between one-third and one-half of 2015 shootings involving a law enforcement officer included a person with a disability per a 2016 Ruderman Foundation report estimate; and

WHEREAS, Locally, one such manifestation of this trend was the killing by the police during their response to a domestic incident of Walter Wallace, Jr., a 27 year old African American resident of Cobbs Creek who was on medication for bipolar disorder, on October 26, 2020, which led to peaceful protests that were in turn met with further escalations in law enforcement response; and

WHEREAS, Many of these horrible outcomes might have been avoided by redirecting calls for assistance away from 9-1-1 and to human-services and mental health providers of 2-1-1 and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 9-8-8; and

WHEREAS, To address these problems, Senator Bob Casey of Pennsylvania this month reintroduced the Law Enforcement Education and Accountability for People with Disabilities (“LEAD”) Initiative, a pair of bills - the Human-services Emergency Logistics Program (“HELP”) Act and the Safe Interactions Act - to nationally address the large number of violent incidents between police and people with disabilities, which have bipartisan support and will have companion legislation offered in the House of Representatives; and

WHEREAS, The HELP ACT would connect people in communities with the human-services and mental health resources they need while reducing the call and response burden on local and state law enforcement agencies by (1) diverting non-criminal, non-fire, and non-medical emergency calls from 9-1-1 systems to state and regional 2-1-1 and 9-8-8 systems, (2) providing each state with funds to build out its 2-1-1 and 9-8-8 referral systems to link callers to both emergency and long-term human-services and mental

health resources in order to address their needs, with special emphasis placed on responses for mental health emergencies, homelessness needs, and other non-criminal emergencies, and connect individuals and families to other human-services needs such as food assistance and child care, and (3) creating an oversight system for the 2-1-1 and 9-8-8 networks comprised of community members who represent older adults, people with disabilities, ethnic and racial minorities and members of other communities, which would be evaluated every year with public recommendations to improve services; and

WHEREAS, Safe Interactions Act would provide 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, with preference 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; and

WHEREAS, 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, and the establishment of an advisory council, chaired by a person with a disability, to oversee the training program development and implementation; and

WHEREAS, Supporters of the package include A.J. Drexel Autism Institute (home of the Philadelphia Autism Project), Autism Connection of Pennsylvania, Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association of Pennsylvania, United Way Worldwide, and the Fraternal Order of Police; and

WHEREAS, People with disabilities should be able to live safely and with dignity, reliably able to interact with law enforcement without fear of violence and to easily access social services directly from providers; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby calls upon the Congress of the United States to enact the Law Enforcement Education and Accountability for People with Disabilities Initiative, bipartisan policing reform bills to address the high incidence rate of violence involving people with disabilities, offered by Senator Bob Casey.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the Congress as evidence of the sincere sentiments of this legislative body.