



UNION COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

BEHIND THE STAR

SHERIFF MALCUM J. "JAMIE" PATTON



What is the Ohio Communication Disability Law?

It's a dark and rainy night. On a heavily traveled road in Union County, a deputy stops a vehicle for a traffic violation. The deputy approaches the driver side window and asks the driver for their license, registration, and proof of insurance. The driver does not say anything and moves around in the vehicle, apparently searching for the requested documents. The deputy asks several more questions and gets no response from the driver. The deputy begins to think the driver may be impaired and asks the driver to exit the vehicle to perform field sobriety tests. The driver stares at the deputy and does not move. The deputy again instructs the driver to exit the vehicle and the driver does not comply. The deputy calls for back up, believing that the driver is being uncooperative. While waiting for back up, the driver again moves around in the vehicle searching for a writing pad and pen. The deputy sees this suspicious behavior and fears the driver may be attempting to hide something or reach for a weapon. The deputy orders the driver to keep his hands on the steering wheel. The driver does not comply. As this situation continues to escalate, the driver uses a pen and notepad to write the deputy a note explaining that he is deaf, or hard of hearing, or has an autism spectrum disorder, or some other communication disability.

Consider this scenario and imagine the challenges citizens with communication disabilities face when interacting with law enforcement officers in the State of Ohio. These encounters can be made easier due to the development of a database system that provides law enforcement officers with advanced notice a driver or passenger in a vehicle they have stopped has a communication disability. The communication disabilities database is connected to the Law Enforcement Automated Data System that Ohio Law Enforcement Officers use frequently when dealing with traffic violations. Participation in the database is completely voluntary. Individuals with a medically diagnosed communication disability who drive, or families that regularly have someone with this type of disability in their vehicle, can obtain a verification form that their physician validates and send it to the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles. "Stopping traffic violators can be a dangerous activity for our deputies. Access to this type of information will reduce the confusion and stress involved with these types of traffic stops," said Sheriff Jamie Patton. There are thousands of drivers in Ohio with these types of disabilities. Participation in this program will help deputies know in advance that the driver or a person in the vehicle they have stopped may have difficulty communicating. This awareness will help reduce potential misunderstandings and problems that may arise during the traffic stop.

For more information about the Communication Disability Law and to access a video that explains the program in detail, please follow this link: <https://ood.ohio.gov/information/communication-disability-law>

“The Union County Sheriff’s Office wants to make any encounter with law enforcement a less stressful event,” concluded Sheriff Jamie Patton. If you have any questions or need help filling out the Communication Disability forms, please contact Deputy Rich Crabtree at 937-645-4100, ext. 4310 or by email at rcrabtree@co.union.oh.us.