



The Safe Interactions Act (SIA) Summary

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 often is 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 more likely to be victims of a serious crime than people without a disability. These occurrences lead them to have an increased number of interactions with law enforcement officers, who may be unprepared for or lack knowledge about the best approach for communicating 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 individuals 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 who have formed a partnership with a law enforcement agency or agencies, to develop training programs that support safe interactions between law enforcement officers and people with disabilities by increase 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.

The Act would require:

- Partnership 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 including intellectual and developmental, mental health, sensory and/or physical.
- A minimum of eight hours of training for new law enforcement officers, with four hours involving interactive sessions led by trainers with disabilities.
- The establishment of an advisory council, chaired by a person with a disability, to oversee the training program development and implementation.

Supporters: Autism Society of America, The Arc of the United States, Maryland Department of Disabilities, National Disability Rights Network, The National Council on Independent Living, Autism Society of Pittsburgh, National Federation of the Blind, Autism Connection of Pennsylvania, ACHIEVA, The Arc of Greater Pittsburgh, National Association of the Deaf, United Way Worldwide, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, National Down Syndrome Congress, Association of University Centers on Disabilities, Paralyzed Veterans of America, ANCOR, The Arc of PA, Public Interest Law Center, Center for American Progress

Cosponsors: Gillibrand, Duckworth, Merkley, Hirono, Blumenthal, Brown



Safe Interactions Act of 2020 Section by Section

Section I – Short Title

Safe Interactions Act of 2020

Section II – Findings

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

Section III – Purposes

To providing 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 training will:

- a. Increase the awareness, knowledge and understanding of law enforcement officers about people with disabilities and their needs in order to reduce incidences 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 about effective ways to interact with people with disabilities to maximize their safety and minimize situations of risk to 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 – Attorney General will Oversee Grant Funds for the Act

The Attorney general 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 partnership with a law enforcement agency to receive funds and develop and deliver the training program. Applications must also describe the training with timeline for completion and show expertise in trainings of law enforcement regarding 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, and the inclusion of multiple levels of law enforcement in the trainings.

Section 5d – Use of Funds

Funds must be used to modify existing trainings for new law enforcement officers to provide eight total hours of training, with at least four hours taught by an individual with a disability. Funds must also be used to provide additional annual trainings of at least three 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 V – Authorization for Appropriations

Section 5a. Appropriation Amounts

\$50,000,000 is allocated for grant activities for fiscal years 2021 through 2024

If you would like more information on the Safe Interactions Act please contact Thomas Eagen (Thomas_Eagen@aging.senate.gov) or Michael Gamel-McCormick (Michael_Gamel-McCormick@aging.senate.gov).