



FACT SHEET

Citizen's Patrol Unit: Tips for Voluntary Enforcement of Disabled Parking Laws and Ordinances

by NLLIC Staff
(Revised 2008)

Accessible (“handicapped”) parking spaces allow individuals with disabilities the opportunity to access the same businesses that the general population enjoys. Unfortunately, not everyone understands the needs or respects the rights of people with disabilities. Putting together a Citizen’s Patrol Unit is one approach used by many communities to keep designated accessible parking spaces available for those who are legally entitled to their use. Forming partnerships with local law enforcement officials can provide positive solutions as well. Trained volunteers can be depended upon to follow procedures for violations of this nature. This enables police officers to concentrate on other aspects of their job.

Be Knowledgeable!

The first step is to become knowledgeable about existing statutes in your state. Some states may have this information on the Web. Check out the Yahoo directory at http://dir.yahoo.com/Government/U_S_Government/State_Government/, call your local public library, state legislative clerk, or the offices of Congressional members of your state’s Senate or House of Representatives to obtain current information about your state’s laws. Information on how to contact your state Congressman is often published in the local newspaper or may be found at the public library. Ask for information on existing legislation pertaining to volunteer enforcement of disabled parking laws and ordinances.

If your state’s laws allow volunteer enforcement units, the next step is to determine if the city, county or metropolitan government has established a special enforcement unit. If a citizen patrol unit is in place, ask for information on qualifications for volunteers such as age or residency, and training programs.

What Should You Do If Your State Hasn’t Passed Legislation?

Determine local interest in this issue. Run an advertisement in the local newspapers, contact disabilities organizations in your area and ask them to spread the word, contact local support groups, practitioners, and facilities that serve the disabled. Keep lists of individuals who are interested, along with contact information for each. As you develop and implement your plan for starting a citizen patrol unit, you can use this list to announce planning meetings, solicit data and signatures as needed, and request participation in meetings with your legislators.

Obtain copies of legislation from neighboring states. Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Nevada and Tennessee are only a few of the many states with existing statutes that can serve as models for your state. Using these examples, you can draft a model document to submit to your legislators. Use mail, phone calls and personal visits to present your information. You will want to convey the number of constituents affected and the key

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reasons why this legislation is important. Remember that accessible parking laws benefit not only the disabled but also the businesses that serve the disabled population.

The department of motor vehicles can provide statistics for accessible permits issued, which should reflect the number of affected residents. The extent of violations can be determined by taking a sample of the number of violations observed at various parking lots during periods of high traffic over several days.

Do not become discouraged. Getting legislation passed is a process, requiring persistence in acting and communicating on behalf of your cause.

Establishing a Local Citizen Patrol Unit

When legislation is in place at the state level, you can then work toward getting a local citizen patrol unit established. State legislation will provide many of the guidelines for establishing the voluntary enforcement unit. Guidelines may include the following:

- Volunteers are appointed by a law enforcement agency authorized to enforce parking laws
- Volunteers shall be a resident of the city or county
- Preference shall be given to applicants with a disability
- Age requirement, e.g., over age 21
- Training requirements
- Volunteers are not to be considered law enforcement officers
- Special badges, identification or clothing such as a vest may be worn while on duty.

Using the state guidelines, develop a proposal for a local citizen patrol unit. Keep responsibilities simple, clear, and attainable. Avoid anything that will complicate and delay the process. Direct confrontation with offenders is discouraged. Tickets can be written and placed on the vehicle while the offender is inside the place of business. Your objective is to make your proposal so simple that there will be no reason to turn it down.

Present your proposal to the local chief of police or sheriff to request input and support. Avoid offending local authorities by criticizing their efforts. Present your plan as a partnership in serving local citizens. Before being accepted, your proposal may need to be modified to accommodate facts or information of which you were not aware. Listen to all of the input with an open mind and consider local authorities a part of your team.

You may be asked to present the proposal to the city council or county commissioners. Communicate with as many members of the governing body as possible prior to the meeting to state your purpose and to respond to questions they may have. Be prepared to provide information on existing statutes, numbers of residents and businesses affected, and examples of successful programs in other locations. It is helpful to hear their concerns individually and to be prepared before you make the final presentation to the group.

Sample "Parking Tickets"

This notice was originally published by the ACA in order to help raise public awareness of Violations of Accessibility Codes. These warnings can be displayed and distributed when one encounters such violations. On



the back of each notice a space is provided for individuals and support groups to include group information. Download and print two-sided on brightly colored paper.

<http://www.amputee-coalition.org/resources/handicapped-parking-ticket.pdf>

Share Your Experiences

ACA is interested in hearing about your experiences as you pursue development of a Citizen's Patrol Unit. Please contact us with information on successes, failures, frustrations, and resources that you found useful.

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