

A Message from
ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL
KWAME RAOUL



Law enforcement officers have pledged to ensure 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 visually impaired. They may be victims, perpetrators, and witnesses.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), persons who are blind or visually impaired 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.

To guarantee the rights of people whose disability affects vision, we must make every effort to establish effective communication. Law enforcement agencies, therefore, are required to make reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures as needed to accommodate those who are blind or have a visual impairment.

I commend you for your continued work to safeguard Illinoisans and hope that you find the information in this brochure helpful as you work with people who are blind or visually impaired.

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Individuals with hearing or speech disabilities can reach us by using the 7-1-1 relay service.

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**Law Enforcement Guide to
Interacting with People Who Are
Blind or Visually Impaired**



The Rights of Persons Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

It is important for law enforcement officers to respect the rights of people who are blind or visually impaired. Some of those rights include:

- The right to have printed materials provided in an alternate format, including large print, audiotape, compact disc, computer diskette, and Braille, upon request.
- The right to have effective communication with law enforcement officers in their communities.

Tips for Positive and Effective Interactions with Persons Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

- Initiate contact and identify yourself.
 - Introduce yourself immediately as a law enforcement officer and have others who are 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 your interview without informing victims why you are silent.
 - Express attentiveness, concern, and compassion through your voice and choice of words.
 - Offer to fill out forms and read written information aloud for victims. Be sure to explain all printed materials and make those materials available in alternative format upon request.

- Be sure to orient individuals to their surroundings as you walk with them.
- Do not label or define people by their impairment. For example, refer to the person as a “woman who is visually impaired” rather than a “blind woman.”
- Pay attention to your tone.
 - Do not speak loudly. Most people who are blind or visually impaired hear well.
 - Avoid pitying or talking down to a person who is blind.

The Rights of Guide Dog Users

Many persons with visual impairments have guide dogs. These dogs are trained working animals, and both the animals and their companions have important rights:

- The Illinois White Cane Law and Guide Dog Access Act make it a misdemeanor to deny a person with a guide dog or service animal access to any public accommodation, including restaurants, stores, medical facilities, and government buildings.
- In Illinois, it is illegal to abuse or kill service animals. This includes guide dogs. 510 ILCS 70/4.03-04.
- A person with a guide dog or service animal may recover civil penalties if someone injures or in any way impairs the ability of the guide dog or service animal to provide services. 740 ILCS 13/10.



Tips for Positive and Effective Interactions with Guide Dog Users and Guide Dogs

When interacting with someone who uses a guide dog, remember these basic guidelines:

- Never pet a guide dog without permission.
- Guide dogs are working animals, not pets. Guide dogs are specifically trained to perform certain tasks, and are also bred and trained to be socialized and non-aggressive.
- Guide dogs must accompany their companions at all times. Therefore, an attack on a guide dog can have the same effect as an assault on its companion. These guide dogs must receive the same protection and respect as their companions.

Important Laws Regarding Persons Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

- Americans With Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.
- Illinois Human Rights Act, 775 ILCS 5/1
- Guide Dog Access Act, 720 ILCS 630/1
- Illinois White Cane Law, 775 ILCS 30
- Assistance Animal Damages Act, 510 ILCS 70/4.03
- Illinois Vehicle Code - Pedestrian Right-of-Way, 625 ILCS 5, Section 1-177