

**SUBJECT:** Information on driving with autism in driver's license offices

**COMMITTEE:** Homeland Security and Public Safety — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 7 ayes — P. King, Burns, Hinojosa, Holland, Metcalf, Schaefer, Wray  
0 nays  
2 absent — Nevárez, J. Johnson

**WITNESSES:** For — Jennifer Allen, Aspergers101  
Against — None  
On — Joe Peters, Department of Public Safety; Ronald Paul Lucey, Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities

**BACKGROUND:** Transportation Code, sec. 521.125 requires the Department of Public Safety to print on the reverse side of a driver's license, as space allows, any medical information relating to a licensee's health condition that may impede communication with a peace officer. This medical information must be disclosed voluntarily by a license applicant and evidenced by a written statement from a physician. The department also must, as space allows, place a uniform symbol or code on the face of the license where a restriction is indicated.

**DIGEST:** HB 1434 would allow informational materials and videos on driving with autism to be made publicly available inside driver's license offices. The materials would be developed by an appropriate entity determined by the Department of Public Safety.  
  
The bill would take effect September 1, 2017.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** HB 1434 would help spread awareness about the "communication impediment" restriction available to drivers diagnosed with autism or another health condition that results in a speech or social communication

impediment by allowing informational materials to be made available in driver's license offices. An increase in awareness could lead to more eligible drivers seeking this designation, resulting in better communication with peace officers and a reduction in barriers to transportation for drivers with certain health conditions.

These brochures, posters, and other materials would help not only drivers with autism but those with other communication impediments by listing the health conditions that can make someone eligible for the restriction. Communication impediments may result from a neurodevelopmental disorder, such as Asperger's syndrome, deafness, or speech and language disorders, or from an acquired condition, such as Parkinson's disease, loss of hearing, brain injury, or post-traumatic stress disorder.

Drivers with these health conditions may face challenges when communicating with peace officers during a traffic stop, but having the communication impediment designation on a driver's license could allow drivers to alert peace officers to their communication challenges or difficulty understanding social cues and avoid unnecessary frustration for both parties.

Raising awareness about the communication impediment restriction could help eliminate barriers to transportation for those with these health conditions. The presence of the restriction could lead to reduced anxiety for those driving with autism and for their family members, increasing the willingness to drive. Access to personal transportation increases independence and provides greater opportunities in society.

Legislation would help keep the Legislature aware of the information available in driver's license offices. An organization seeking to make information available would work in consultation with the department to create appropriate materials and would assume the costs associated with producing the materials.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES: An identical companion bill, SB 853 by Nelson, was referred to the Senate Committee on Transportation on February 27.