

**The President's Task Force on
21st Century Policing
February 14, 2015
Phoenix, Arizona**

Good Afternoon, my name is Renaldo Fowler; I am a Senior Staff Advocate with the Arizona Center for Disability Law.

I would like to thank President Obama for convening the task force on 21st Century Policing and for the panel for asking me to be here today to present this testimony on behalf of the Arizona Center on Disability Law (Center) and the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)

The (Center) is the federally-designated Protection and Advocacy System for the State of Arizona. Protection and Advocacy Systems (P&As) throughout the United States assure that the human and civil rights of persons with disabilities are protected. P&A's are also authorized to pursue appropriate legal and administrative remedies on behalf of persons with disabilities to insure the enforcement of their constitutional and statutory rights.

NDRN is the national membership organization for the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) System, the nationwide network of congressionally mandated, legally based disability rights agencies. (P&A) exists in every U.S. state and territory and are the largest providers of legally-based services for people with disabilities in the country.

My testimony today will focus on several areas: the interaction of law enforcement relating to students with special needs in the educational setting and; the interaction of law enforcement with persons with mental illness, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities and the deaf and hard of hearing community.

We (Center) have observed a troubling trend, in the manner in which schools are utilizing law enforcement, in response to disability related behaviors. In many of these cases, school often seeks intervention from law enforcement, instead of providing the appropriate positive behavior supports to address the student's needs. Students with emotional disabilities and intellectual disabilities are at the greatest risk of these interactions. These interactions with law enforcement often start at a very young age, in our school systems. We have encountered students with disabilities as young as 8 having contact with law enforcement.

Additionally we have been made aware that large numbers of persons with mental illness, intellectual disabilities, and hearing impairments are coming into contact with law enforcement agencies. Unfortunately, many of these interactions with law enforcement have led to injury and in some instances, death of individuals with disabilities.

The Center puts forth the following recommendations:

- Training for all Resource Officers relating to special needs students

- Develop uniform standards for collecting data and reporting law enforcement interaction in the school system to the U. S Department of Education.

- Continue Federal and State support for Positive Behavior Supports in the school system

For many adult individuals with mental illness and intellectual disabilities, they are frequently faced with inadequate access to appropriate community mental health treatment and other community base supports and services often resulting in people with disabilities coming into contact with law enforcement. We recommendtraining of officers???

The deaf and hard of hearing community continues to experience challenges when encountering law enforcement. State and local police and law enforcement agencies are required to take action to ensure effective communication with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. They are required to provide the accommodations that are necessary to ensure effective communication, such as qualified interpreters, CART, or assistive listening devices. For example, it may be impossible to provide interpreter services when a police officer stops a person with a hearing disability on a routine traffic violation. The police officer should take any other action possible to communicate effectively with the individual, such as exchanging written information until the effective accommodation arrives.