ASSEMBLY, No. 2409

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 3, 2020

Sponsored by:
Assemblyman HAROLD "HAL" J. WIRTHS
District 24 (Morris, Sussex and Warren)
Assemblywoman CAROL A. MURPHY
District 7 (Burlington)
Assemblyman NICHOLAS CHIARAVALLOTI
District 31 (Hudson)

Co-Sponsored by:
Assemblywoman Pinkin and Assemblyman Space

SYNOPSIS

Requires MVC to place notation on vehicle’s registration certificate indicating registrant is deaf.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 10/8/2020)

AN ACT concerning notations on vehicle registration certificates indicating the registrant is deaf and supplementing chapter 3 of Title 39 of the Revised Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. Upon application by any person with a hearing loss of a pure tone average of 41 dB or greater, verified by an otorhinolaryngologist (ENT) or an audiologist clinically certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the Chief Administrator of the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission shall issue to the applicant a special registration certificate bearing the international symbol for deafness or a numerical code designating deafness, whichever shall be specified by the applicant. The deafness designation shall only be placed on the special registration certificate and renewal of such designation shall be done during renewal of a motor vehicle registration. The design of the special registration certificate shall be approved by the Chief Administrator of the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission. No fee over and above the required fee for a registration certificate shall be imposed for the special registration certificate.

2. This act shall take effect on the 180th day after enactment and shall apply to motor vehicle registration certificates issued or renewed on or after this date.

STATEMENT

This bill would require the Chief Administrator of the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission to place a notation on a vehicle's registration certificate indicating the registrant is deaf. This notation would be placed on the certificate provided the applicant has a hearing loss of 41 decibels or greater. As part of the application process, an otorhinolaryngologist (ENT) or an audiologist clinically certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association is required to verify the applicant's hearing ability. Upon approval, the Chief Administrator is required to issue the applicant a special registration certificate with the international symbol for deafness or a numerical code designating deafness, whichever the applicant prefers. No additional fees will be assessed for applicants who seek a special registration certificate.

For individuals who are deaf, communicating with law enforcement can be a challenge. An officer may not understand what the individual is trying to say or misinterpret any movements or gestures as a sign of aggression and respond with force.

Incidents of this nature highlight the extent to which officer training fails to prepare graduates for interactions with the deaf community.

Many members of law enforcement receive limited training and resources to help them communicate with the deaf community. Some departments dedicate more time instructing trainees on urgent matters such as use of force, firearms, driving, and first aid. Other departments find they lack the financial resources to ensure officers can access interpreters and translation equipment.

Here in New Jersey, local law enforcement is attempting to break down communication barriers by participating in panel discussions with members of the deaf community. These discussions allow individuals who are deaf to ask questions in a non-adversarial setting and provide suggestions for what officers can do during traffic stops to ensure a deaf driver can better understand an officer's instructions. Under New Jersey law, those who are deaf or hard of hearing may apply to receive a deaf or hard of hearing designation on their driver's license. The sponsor believes that placing a notation on a vehicle's registration certificate is one step towards improving how members of law enforcement communicate with motorists during routine traffic stops and prevent future tragedies that may occur as the result of a misunderstanding.