

HISTORIC
HUNTLEY



Telephone (703) 971-6262
Fax (703) 971-3032
E-mail: leedist@fairfaxcounty.gov
Web site: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/lee

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
COUNTY OF FAIRFAX

6121 Franconia Road
Alexandria, VA 22310



Rodney L. Lusk
LEE DISTRICT SUPERVISOR

Board Matter

January 26, 2021

Mr. Chairman—Thousands of our Fairfax County neighbors are differently-abled, or live with a diagnosed developmental disability, including approximately 27,000 of our FCPS students. Our county has made tremendous investments in our special education infrastructure, and has prioritized accessibility and equality through our One Fairfax commitment. As a result of those investments, many of our differently-abled neighbors are empowered to live, work and play in our community however they might choose. The ability to drive is a critical component in empowering our young people and adults with disabilities to access work experiences and live independent lives.

However, some of these residents are still limited from reaching their full potential. Over the past several months I've met with educators, advocates and parents to discuss the transportation challenges facing our differently-abled population in Fairfax County—specifically challenges associated with routine traffic stops.

Many of these residents have successfully overcome their own individual challenges to the degree that they can live an independent lifestyle, including

the ability to successfully obtain a driver's license. Unfortunately, they are often held back by the uncertainty and social anxiety that many of us—regardless of our abilities—experience during routine traffic stops. Getting pulled over is part of being a driver. Our Fairfax County police officers conduct thousands of traffic stops every year, almost all without incident, and all in the pursuit of maintaining the safety of our roads and citizens.

Unfortunately, in these routine situations the unavoidable anxiety that we all feel, despite the professional conduct of our patrol officers, can be drastically amplified in individuals with social, developmental, communication, or anxiety challenges.

The fear of that amplification escalating into a situation that is dangerous for a driver, and our law enforcement officers, is what unfortunately keeps many of our differently-abled neighbors off the road, despite the fact that they are able to successfully obtain a driver's license.

In response to this challenge, my office partnered with the Fairfax County Police Department, School Board Member Rachna Sizemore Heizer, and the Arc of Northern Virginia to run a pilot program in the Lee District to create a safe training environment to empower these drivers to achieve the equality of access that they deserve, and provide police officers additional opportunities to interact with drivers with disabilities.

In two separate public trainings we created scenarios in which residents were able to simulate the experience of a routine traffic stop in a safe and

controlled environment—inside their own car, in a vacant parking lot, and with their parent or other supportive persons in the car with them.

In each instance a FCPD officer was also in the passenger seat to talk them through best practices in real time as they experienced the stops. Drivers received feedback following the stop from the officer that pulled them over, as well as a laminated card to keep in their car to refer to for best practices during a future stop.

These trainings gave the drivers, parents and advocates who participated the confidence to utilize their full independence, and alleviated the unavoidable anxiety that has kept so many of them off the road.

I also received positive feedback from the officers who participated in the pilot, sharing with me that this experience will help them to better interact with differently-abled drivers in the future.

The interest in the programing exceeded my initial expectations, with dozens of families from all across the county participating. Due to the support of our fantastic partners, as well as the professionalism and dedication of the FCPD, it was an unquestioned success.

With that in mind Mr. Chairman, I will make the following motions:

- 1.) That the County Executive direct the appropriate staff to liaise with the station commanders of each FCPD station in the county to conduct a similar pilot in their districts in order to gauge the viability of such

trainings; and, subject to feedback, that those trainings be conducted on a bi-annual basis. Best practices on logistics and implementation would be shared with each station from our pilot program, and such trainings could easily be incorporated into existing programming such as Sensory Day.

- 2.) That the County Executive direct the appropriate staff to prepare a report to be circulated to the Board of Supervisors, as well as the School Board, for understanding the process, rules and regulations related to potentially implementing these trainings into all driver's education courses offered through FCPS.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.