

Dear Senator,

My name is Gina Schuh, and I am a resident of Gilbert, Arizona. For this letter to make sense, I need to tell you a little about myself. I moved to Arizona when I was 18, in 2003, to pursue my dreams of becoming a chef. Unfortunately, October 11, 2003 I had a diving accident that shattered my fifth cervical vertebrae, rendering me a quadriplegic. Going from the farmer's daughter who was an all-star athlete to a wheelchair user at 18 was devastating, but more than that it was eye opening. The abuse of disability resources as well as blatant discrimination is not only common, but to be expected. I was unable to be a chef, but that was fine because I was meant to be an advocate. I went back to school within a year, starting over completely because "Bread Making 101" does not transfer. Over the next 10 years, multiple surgeries, and unforeseen setbacks I obtained my Bachelors of Science in Political Science and my Juris Doctor degrees.

I initially chose law school so I could be an advocate, and that is where I find myself today. The disabled community is severely underrepresented in the federal, state, and local governments, despite 1 in 5 Americans being disabled. The only way for our voices to be heard, is for us to speak in the first place, but we need someone to listen. That someone is you.

On January 14, 2017 I will be hosting a gathering at my home for individuals in wheelchairs, and I would love for you to join us between 4:00PM-6:00PM. At our meeting we will be focusing on one main advocacy goal; End Disabled Parking Misuse and Abuse. The severe misuse and abuse of disabled parking is fundamentally affecting the independence of the individuals who rely on those spaces to open their ramps or unload mobility equipment.

You are invited because I believe you can positively impact disabled parking. I have included and invite as well as a document outlining the types of abuse, facts, and suggested solutions.

Sincerely,

Gina Schuh

Gina Schuh, J.D.

Contact Information:

Phone: (209) 631-5466

Email: ginaschuh@yahoo.com

Arizona Disabled Parking

Overview

The facts surrounding disabled parking permits supports that medical professionals are abusing their discretion when issuing disabled permits. There is no system in place that provides accountability, because neither the government nor the medical board regulates disabled permits once they have been issued. Furthermore, a failure to enforce disabled parking violations at the police level has contributed to a substantial amount of abuse by individuals without disabled parking. Nobody is regulating disabled parking, and the small group of individuals who require disabled parking are suffering the consequences.

Current Facts

- Arizona's overall population has increased by **25%** since 2002.
- The total number of disabled plates and placards issued has increased by **83%** since 2002, however the disabled population has actually decreased.
- In 2000, **12%** of Arizonans had a disability under the age of 65. In 2015 it **decreased to 8%**, yet the number of disabled plates and placards has consistently increased.
- On average **20,892** new disabled plates and placards are issued every year.
- Temporary disabled placards have increase by **274%** since 2002, despite no significant increase in reported injuries.
- The **number of disabled parking spaces required has increased 0%** since **1992**.
- The **maximum** number of disabled parking spaces required is **4%**, despite disabled plates and placards currently account for **8%** of the total number of registered plates and placards. In most cases, only **1%-2%** of the spaces are required to be disabled parking spaces.
- Disabled parking fraud (use of another individual's placard/plate) accounts for approximately **25%** of all disabled plates and placards according to a Phoenix Police Expert.
- According to the US Census **8%** of Arizonan's have a disability (***not necessarily mobility related***), based on the current population that is a total of 546,245 disabled people in Arizona, **97,723 less** than the total number of disabled plates and placards.
- There are **17% more disabled plates and placards** than **disabled individuals** in Arizona.

Types of Abuse

- **Third Party Use** – It is illegal for anyone to use disabled parking other than the person who it was initially issued to. Third party use contributes to the most of the disabled parking abuse. However, with no identification on the placard or plate it is impossible for civilians to be confident in reporting third party use.
- **Parking on the Access Aisle** – Both individuals with disabled parking and those without park on the hashed access aisle adjacent to van accessible spaces. Doing so inevitably

blocks access to ramp vehicles, making the parking space unusable for the wheelchair user.



- ***Failure to Exit the Vehicle*** – The disabled person must be exiting or entering the vehicle, not staying inside to wait.
- ***Fraudulently Obtained*** – Exaggerating disability in order to legally obtain disabled parking.
- ***No Plate or Placard*** – Individuals who do not have a disabled parking permit continue to use the disabled parking space, despite it being illegal. The lack of enforcement by police has contributed greatly to this form of abuse.

Contributing Factors

There is abuse going on at every step in the disabled parking process. The medical profession, government, and police have all contributed to the failure of achieving the original goal of disabled parking.

Medical Professionals –

- Failure to properly prescribe disabled parking, and instead abuse of discretion has attributed to the absurd increase in disabled plates and placards.

Government –

- Failure to update disabled parking laws to accurately represent the disabled population, as well as update laws to prevent abuse.
- Failure to regulate the disabled parking program after creation.
- Disconnected with the actual needs of the disabled community due to a lack of representation of disabled individuals in government.

Police –

- An admitted lack of priority for enforcing disabled parking violations has allowed abuse to go on unpunished. Due to a lack of enforcement, people continue to abuse disabled parking without fear of being ticketed.
- The lack of enforcement and blind eye towards abuse has directly contributed to a substantial loss of spaces that would otherwise be available.

Solutions

Medical Professionals –

- Education specifically pertaining to issuing disabled parking permits at Continuing Medical Education (CME's) classes and medical schools.
- Put in place an auditing system to detect medical professionals who abuse their discretion and fail to meet their ethical obligation as a medical professional.

Government –

- Amend statewide disabled parking laws to accurately address the current needs.
- Prohibit+ parking on the access aisle for anyone, essentially creating a no parking zone.
- Audit and track the current program.
- Require the return of a plate and placard after the individual no longer requires disabled parking or passes away.

Police –

- Education for police officers on proper disabled permit use.
- Enforce current laws with a greater priority.
- Volunteer enforcement programs modeled after Phoenix's "Save Our Space" program.

Conclusion

There is no need to change the current system, but instead merely implement it as it was originally intended and enforce it. Education for medical professionals, disabled placard holders, and police is *crucial* in ending the astonishing amount of abuse. Education paired with consistent enforcement will make tremendous improvements on the overall disabled parking program.