



For Immediate Release

February 25, 2009

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Deaf Drivers Receive Help from the Maryland Sheriffs' Association
Visor Card Aids Deaf Motorists during Traffic Stops

Annapolis, MD – Routine traffic stops across the State of Maryland are not so 'routine' for those in the deaf community or for those law enforcement officers who do not know they may be pulling over a driver with hearing loss. Seemingly minor miscommunications between driver and officer can lead to serious misunderstandings.

In an effort to streamline communication between the deaf-driving community and statewide law enforcement, the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA), developed a Deaf Driver Visor card which instructs deaf and hard of hearing motorists on how to respond during a traffic stop. The visor card has a dual purpose in notifying the officer that the driver cannot hear or has some hearing loss.

The laminated visor card is to be placed in the windshield of the vehicle and states DRIVER IS DEAF. Upon seeing the visor card, the officer will acknowledge that the driver has a hearing loss and will be better prepared to deal with the potential communication challenges of the situation.

The Deaf Driver Visor Program was initially instituted in 2002. The expanded outreach program continues this New Year as part of MSA's on-going initiative to support members of the community and increase positive communication between all levels of local and statewide law enforcement and Maryland citizens.

"The visor card helps to eliminate stress on both sides of the car door," says Sheriff R. Jay Fisher, Sheriff of Baltimore County and President of the Maryland Sheriffs' Association. "If a driver misunderstands the verbal commands of the officer, there can be unfortunate consequences. With the visor card, MSA feels that both driver and law enforcement officer start off with a mutual understanding."

"The Deaf Driver Visor Program is an important tool to establish the groundwork for clear, effective communication during routine traffic stops for those who choose to use it," said Lisa Kornberg, Director of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. "It provides the opportunity for drivers with hearing loss to alert an officer that they may not be able to hear or understand their requests while maintaining the safety of both the driver and the officer."

The original deaf visor card was created with the assistance of a deaf advocate. The cards are available through Sheriff's Offices statewide in 23 counties and in Baltimore City. Twenty-thousand visor cards are currently available to the deaf driving community.

The Maryland Sheriffs' Association represents the Office of the Sheriff in every county and Baltimore City. Maryland Sheriffs are the only law enforcement officials in the state who are elected by the people they serve and protect.

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