

>> (Inaudible) for mobility impaired individuals. And they tried to make sure that that's going to be enforced as well because especially St. Thomas is very dense.

Julian, why don't you give an explanation of what you have to do to exit and enter your car on a daily basis.

>> Well, you know, once I pull – get to my vehicle, my door has to open completely. Because if the door opens like halfway, like what you would normally open your door and step out, I wouldn't be able to come close enough to the seat of the car to be able to transfer. So once I get in that position, then I have to then slide over from my wheelchair into the car. That process takes, you know, where you have to move and raise your body up to get in.

The thing – after that is that then you have to take apart your wheelchair. So I have to totally disassemble that chair and get it into the backseat of the car.

>> While the door – while the door is open –

>> While the door is open.

>> You have to disassemble – disassemble your wheelchair –

>> Yep. So while I stretch outside and have to reach over, take off the wheels, take off the cushion, fold the chair down, then everything – I put the wheels in first. Seat cushion second. Then the whole chair, lift it up, put it into the backseat of the car, and raise up my seat, and drive off. What's really amazing with that is initially when I got injured, I was actually working a chair company. And we had three locations on the island. I was a supervisor for that company. So I had to do that maybe like 12, 13, 14 times a day, just in and out. But it's what we have to do. And the hardship's why the access aisles are so important because if the door can't open up completely, that person, whether they're in a wheelchair or they have one of those walkers, they can't exit or enter their car.

>> Right. And what we say by access aisles is if you see the blue lines, and they have hashtags, or white ones or blue ones, a lot of people, that's what I said, don't understand that's called an access aisle. There may be on either side of it a universal symbol of a person in a wheelchair. But the whole entire area is for access to perhaps a ramp that's close to those parking spots, and that's also very, very important not to block the ramp. And I've seen people who say, okay, I'm not parking in the parking spot, but they pull up and really block the ramp as well so the persons in a wheelchair have to go out into the traffic lane to get around the cars and also, you know, get to an access point where they can get onto the sidewalk.

>> And when we look at a small territory like the Virgin Islands, you know, we would like to also, like Augie (sp) mentioned, as far as what – who qualifies to get a parking – a parking placard. And you could have a mobility disability from different things, whether you have lung issues, you have, you know, heart issues, you have different things that is not – you don't physically see that person as a person with a disability. And that's why we're hoping that even the physicians, if you have a patient that you feel like, okay, I will help this patient and, you know, they are my friend, and they – they want a placard because of whatever, and then you go and you sign that document. We're asking for your support to make sure that when you're – you're approving that person, that those individuals that you're approving, it's because of they have a mobility disability.

Now there's people who get temporary disability placards, and that's the other thing that we have where we don't have a lot of those issued in the Territory. But, you know, I know that individuals who have hip surgery sometimes, or certain types of surgeries and the doctor would say, okay, your path – or your process with therapy, you should be 90% recovered in three months or four months, they would then issue a placard if you request one because of traversing from where you would normally park to your home or to your business or job or whatever, it's a distance, so they would then be able to issue you a temporary parking placard. And those – those have a date where they are given, and then they expire.

The challenge that we have in the Territory right now is that the temporary placards and the permanent placards are all the same color. So it would take someone who wants to be vigilant to look at the placard and say this is – this placard is expired and you're still parking in this spot, and that person would then be in a position where they would get a violation.

Have you have any of those or run into any of those temporary placards Officer Penn (sp)?

>> No I have not. I have only seen ones that are for the year until the vehicle has to be re-registered again. Or the person has to go back to their doctor. But I've never seen the temporary.

>> Yeah. So what we're hoping, B&B, they're working towards a new placard. The one that would be hanging from your rearview mirror. And those will have, then, the different colors where the temporary would be red, and they would be punched out by months, and the permanents would be blue. So that would make the Department – would you love to see that, Officer Penn?

>> I would. I would.

>> Right. And I think it would make a difference for everyone to be able to identify that this is now a differentiation between both types of placards and help us to start enforcing these (inaudible) parking spots.

>> The other issue, as I was talking to Officer Penn, is that we have an aging population, which I'm a part of. And one of the things for the deaf and hard of hearing is attempting to get a placard for them as well to identify. And on that placard it instructs the person if they are stopped to keep a hold of the steering wheel, for one. Because technically whatever the officer is explaining to the person, they can't hear them. That's one of the things I'm – I'm also reaching out that they give over the loudspeaker to get out, exit your vehicle. If they don't move and are holding on to the steering wheel, there is a reason for that. And to – and to allow them to approach the car. And we're hoping that they can get a placard that will have like a symbol of an ear that they could hold out and the officer will know this person is deaf or hard of hearing. And then they're – then the communication aspect because persons who are deaf communicate a different way. Some, you know, use sign language. Some read lips. Some are bi, you know, they use both methods. Or – we're instructing persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, always carry a pad and a pen or pencil to offer to the officers, you know. Once they show them the placard, here, please tell me what – what's going on, basically.

But you'd be surprised. I know you were indicating you never ran into that situation before. But there are people here who are – who have made complaints to me regarding, you know, being deaf or hard of hearing and having a confrontation with the police. And I think those numbers are going to grow. Two or three of my friends are always leaning their head into me and holding their ear, and I'm sure I'm along the way pretty soon myself.

>> And the percent of people, individuals, you know, once you get a certain age, that the surveys show where you start having hearing issues, and some people have hearing aids. But those also have issues where technically they have technical problems where they need batteries, batteries change, or they need different things with different prescriptions, so then you find these individuals have been driving all their lives and now they're not able to respond to commands by the officers. So we're really trying to –

>> And they're very – very, very expensive. A lot of people don't realize how expensive hearing aids are.

>> Yeah, they're over \$4,000.00 at times. And up.

>> And up!

>> And up. And – and, you know, so when you – you say, well, just go get hearing aids, it's like – I can't afford them. You know, because it's, you know – and then you still have to change the batteries, and you have to do all the different things, and sometimes your – your hearing gets worse, so then you have to change the prescription.

>> Okay. Sounds like we're going to a break for our sponsors, and we'll get right back with Officer Penn and Disability Rights: You and Your Life. Ability radio.

>> And who is back, the women of the world. Remember you all had mothers. We've got to [audio break]

>> (Inaudible)

>> Welcome back to Ability Radio. You and Your Life. And we're discussing traffic issues with regard to persons with disabilities. Remember it's a call-in show if you've got – want to call in to ask some questions, we're at 719-1079 and 713-1079, Ability Radio.

As we were discussing some of the issues regarding parking and basically lanes of transportation, or for persons with disabilities, also the pedestrian issue. Sidewalks.

Julian, sidewalks on Main Street. You have a (inaudible) at this point in time?

>> Yes, I do. You know, as we work through, you know, (inaudible) our territory and getting things all set, you know, and Main Street now has some beautiful palm trees. They're about 30 feet high in the air. And they look really, really, really nice. However, you know, I went downtown yesterday just to do a walk through, and noticed that it's really – because they're not put on the – or extended out into the street, the space in between the buildings and the trees now, they're about almost exact to the – maybe and even at times short – of what would be required as a sidewalk for disabled access. Disabled access should be at least five feet minimum as far as from that point to the next. But then you also have to incorporate into that measurement the – if there are stairs to get into the – if there are stairs to get into the – onto the – into the stores that's on Main Street, you have to actually measure from the step. Because the step is not traversable by a person in a mobility device. So you have to then start measuring from the clearance, not the (inaudible) – not the tree, but whatever potage or whatever you have that surrounds that tree, you have to then measure from that edge of that to the edge of wherever it's traversable by individuals.

And I know that it's on the construction. I'm sure there's things that they probably will be planning to do as they move forward with the construction. There's a whole lot going on. But what we would like to do is to make sure we play a part. Because we just – we want to be – we want to empower the disabled community to be able to advocate for themselves and to be able to go downtown and look and see if there's things that they think might serve them better so they could not be segregated out of, you know, living, or working, or going downtown. You know, that's the challenge that we have right now as far as the disabled community, to go and say you could find parking downtown. There's no two-hour parking for an individual with a disability. So if we want to shop for our family for Christmas, that's almost a no-no because then there's no way for us to get downtown to park.

And so, you know, we look at the whole thing as, you know, with all the construction that's going to be going on, that we keep in mind that we want to keep the entire community as part of that – that environment that we could go and traverse and be just like everyone else, because we are like everyone else.

>> Yeah. To want to make the islands totally accessible. And for tourism, that's a win-win situation. Having the sidewalks, the streets, traffic flow, would be best for all three cities, Frederiksted, Christiansted, and St. Thom – Charlotte Amalie. Think about it. If you could have – I see them all the time over at Havensight – a lot of people get off those boats with those little red and blue scooters, and they're – they're bound and determined to go shopping. So all you store owners and – and people on Main Street, think about if your store is accessible to wheelchairs and those battery-operated motor vehicles. Because that may be a customer who has some big pockets and can't get in your store, and they're going to go – just basically roll on down to the next one where they can get in and shop. So if you can make the Island accessible for residents, it benefits your tourist industry as well. Because the ships, since 2000, had to become accessible. But you're going to have to match that accessibility with a tourism that – that – a couple of ships that come in, they're basically all elderly. Ones that come in on Monday and Tuesday.

>> Well, you know, Holland American ships actually have lifers. And we call them lifers because they – they come off the ship and say, oh, this is my eightieth cruise. And this is my, you know, and they – it seems like they have a lot of individuals that actually sail and pass on those ships because of the population. The majority of that population is elderly people.

But with that age bracket comes – well, with that age bracket also comes individuals with disabilities. And, you know, we always, you know, in conversations it's asked for this destination to be one that could brag that we are wheelchair accessible because we are under the laws of the ADA. Tortola is not. St. Martin is not. And a lot of these other Caribbean islands, they are not. But what? They are pushing to put up the same ADA signs. They're still putting up ramp curve cards. They are still doing all the things that is making their territory disability friendly. And by doing so, if you and your family went someplace, and your family member was able to have fun, and go to the beach, and there were carpets – disabled carpets in the sand, and different things, and they were able to have a full vacation on your island, would they go back? Yes, because there's not a lot of Caribbean places that can cater that way.

So all these things is when we look at the department, the police department. And we look at all the things that we ask for enforcement. It's because when – when individuals come here, they want to really come here and be able to enjoy our territory with or without disabilities.

And that brings me to one more question. I'm not sure if you're familiar with this, Officer Penn, but within the laws, if a person who have a placard in the States, for instance you live in Florida and you have one of the windshield placards, and you move to the Territory and you're using your placard, that the officers are giving those individuals a cool courtesy by not giving them a ticket. I know that's what the law is, but how – how does the department deal with that as far as enforcing or not enforcing that law on individuals who visit here and they are disabled in their state but not registered in the Virgin Islands.

>> We were encouraged to honor those placards here in the Virgin Islands for individuals that are visiting. If they are staying here and they move from the States to the Territory, we also encourage them to go to the DMV and to transfer that placard now to the Caribbean – well, to St. Thomas, or St. Croix, St. John. And it can be utilized the same. However, we do not ticket individuals that are visiting. We try to honor that placard, no matter where it came from.

>> Okay. That's great because I know in the books they are still – and we're hoping that the legislature will change that policy when we meet next week on the sixteenth. Because it is still on the books where it is a violation, and I'm glad to see that the department has risen above and beyond that. And know that, for myself, when I travel, I call a rent-a-car agency just like you would, tell them that I'm coming in and I need a car that's outfitted with hand controls. I need to do that three days in advance. And when I land, from the airport, I get into my rental car, and I drive off. And –

>> Do you use your Virgin Islands placard?

>> Yes – yes, I do.

>> Okay.

>> And – and what's great with that is that I'm on vacation or I'm there with my family. I don't have the time to leave from there and find out where DMV is and go and stand in line and get a temporary placard for three days, or two days, or something like that. That's time spent that I can use enjoying where I'm going. And even to Cayman Islands and the different places that you go to, it's actually law, not a courtesy. It's the law that you can use your placards in those destinations.

So it's really good to see that the department has risen above and beyond on (inaudible) that this is a tourism place.

>> Right. And that's another thing for the business community to consider is that the persons with disabilities do not travel alone. Sometimes I see like a whole Safari van of people with someone, you

know, as a family outing, they come to the Virgin Islands. And I see the taxi driver struggling with that wheelchair to get it in the back of a Safari van.

But I think they essentially come in family groups, and maybe one or two of the family members are disabled. But they're having fun because they can all do some activity together. And being a grandfather – I – the sidewalks, I appreciate the curb cuts because when I'm pushing that stroller, it felt like a little armored vehicle, that I appreciated all the accessible routes that were available when I'm visiting my family. So think about it. It's not only for the Holland, but the Disney ship comes in. And there's a lot of strollers, a lot of, you know, family, little ones, walking around. It benefits that sector of the population as well.

>> Well, as we look, and we look forward to, you know, great things happening. And hopefully, as you said, Officer Penn, that, you know, we can work with the department in helping them to better understand some of the challenges that the disabled community are going through on a – whether it's on a monthly, daily, a whatever basis, but also to create that partnership of feeling very relaxed when it's time to communicate with the department because a lot of them, they are afraid to think about, you know, driving or doing things because of communication. And if there's no clear ways of communication because of the fear of their lives, and accidents do happen, whenever you research and you – you see all the (inaudible) online and see all the fatalities that individuals end up getting shot in traffic stops because when they are approached, and they're not app- - not obeying a command from an officer, and that officer don't know that a person is deaf or hard or hearing, being they're thinking that this person is just ignoring their demands and end up pulling their weapons.

So, you know, we really appreciate having you here today. We're hoping that some of the things we discussed, you know, to see some of those great things happen in, you know, the community from the police department and from traffic.

And, you know, any last words for us, Officer Penn?

>> For the motoring public, a reminder, when you park, be aware of where you are parking. How it affects those around you. Not only yourself needs to get to that area but also the disabled individual. Whenever you decide that you may want to park on a sidewalk, remember that someone in a wheelchair may have to be able to access that area. So just be aware of your surroundings when you do things and not just do it for your convenience.

>> Okay. Thank you very much, Officer Penn.

And Julian, I think we'll just give a little shout out for the annual autism conference. Remember, for St. Croix, it's on Monday at the Great Hall starting at 8:30 in the morning. In St. Thomas it's on Wednesday, April 11th, at the University of the Virgin Islands Administration and Conference Center at 8:30. Those with children or relatives with autism, please attend because, again, it's going to focus on disasters and disability, persons having disability, and the trauma that results from (audio break) hopefully that as we roll into the cities and we get ourselves prepared, there's – Red Cross is going to have some trainings. But persons with disabilities, when you hear of preparedness training, please, please, please, please come out. Get some tips. Get some – some information as to how you should prepare for the up – the upcoming season. And we'll also have a lot of discussion working with agencies that work with persons with disabilities.

Julian?

>> And – and one of the other things that we're working on is a survey. And you might be approached or asked to fill out a survey that, you know, have pertinent questions that we wanted to learn about. And it's an emergency – special need emergency survey. And what we're going to do with that is hopefully to compile and see all the challenges that this disabled community had, things that they need, and – to help them prepare for the upcoming season.

We are planning to have a forum in St. Thomas and St. Croix, not exact – don't have the exact dates. But we're working on locations where we will have those forums. And we're hoping by between now and then that we'll get the surveys completed, we'll be able to see and give you better directions to what you need to do or how you go about getting the things that you would need to help you prepare for the upcoming season for the disabled community that we have.

>> Great. And one of the examples was like the small generators, right? That was – that came up through Red Cross, and was distributed in community. Again, that wasn't in the preparation, but those are things they are going to make sure are more available for the next season,

>> Yes, because there was – one of the things that we ran into was people with wheelchairs that didn't have a generator.

So, thank you for being our guests, and the listening audience, and thank you for being here with us.

>> Take care, Virgin Islands.

>> Take care. Bye.

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