

URBAN VIEWS

•RVA•

JP'S LAW PROTECTS PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN VIRGINIA

By Nia Simone McLeod

Virginia has a long history of legislation that not only hugely impacted the Commonwealth but also caused a rippling effect throughout the entire nation. The latest piece of Virginia legislation that has the potential to ripple out nationwide is a law that positively affects and protects the special needs community: JP's Law. If implemented nationwide, the legislation will change the way that law enforcement and the special needs community communicates and has the potential to save lives in the process.

How JP's Law Started

The beginnings of JP's Law laid in a single thought by local author, philanthropist, and

advocate, Pam Mines "What will my child do if they were ever approached by law enforcement?"

The sentiment is shared by millions of women across the nation, especially those who are parents to black boys. But, Mines' concerns had another layer added onto it, because her son was diagnosed with autism.

[As Mines told Autism Parenting Magazine](#), she believed that law enforcement may not know how to respond in an efficient manner to people with special needs, "How would they know to recognize that their reaction with this citizen may be different? How would they know how to respond accordingly, or would the citizens' actions warrant a justified shooting?"



Mines continued, referencing the ever-present anxiety that comes from getting stopped by the police, “For all the concern one may have about interactions with the police, imagine how much more anxiety you have when it involves your loved one who is not able to communicate effectively?”

Mines saw the potential within her concerns to make change throughout her local community and protect her son in the process. She took her ideas to then state legislator Donald McEachin who also saw the potential of this idea to create a law that protected those with special needs. In order to create a law, Mines brought together many different bright minds in her local community. She gathered information from the local and state police, the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, and many different leaders in order to produce what is known today as Senate bill SB367, otherwise known as JP’s Law. The Virginia House of Delegates and the Senate passed the law unanimously, and JP’s Law became effective in the state of Virginia on July 1st, 2014.

Through JP’s Law, individuals are allowed to voluntarily add a code on their Virginia issued driver’s license and/or identification card that relays the fact that they have autism or an intellectual disability. This then informs law enforcement about their disability and gives them the opportunity to respond accordingly, through specialized training.

The Disabled and Law Enforcement

JP’s Law effectively sheds a light on a problem that’s often been overlooked throughout the country: the relationship between the disabled and law enforcement. The community of those with developmental disabilities is an incredibly large group that affects every race, socioeconomic, and ethnic background. [The U.S. Census reports](#) that around 1.2 million adults and 1.7 million children have an intellectual disability.

Having clear communication between law enforcement and the disabled community, like through JP’s Law, can be the difference between life and death. There are many high-profile stories that involve police violence and the disabled. [Adam Trammell](#) and [Laquan McDonald](#) are just a few members of the special needs community who have fallen victim to police violence in recent years. [Studies have shown](#) that as many as half of the people killed by police have a disability.

Even though the statistics behind this issue are clear and prevalent, there has been a lack of a national initiative to push for the education of law enforcement and the protection of the special needs community.

How JP’s Law Impacts Today

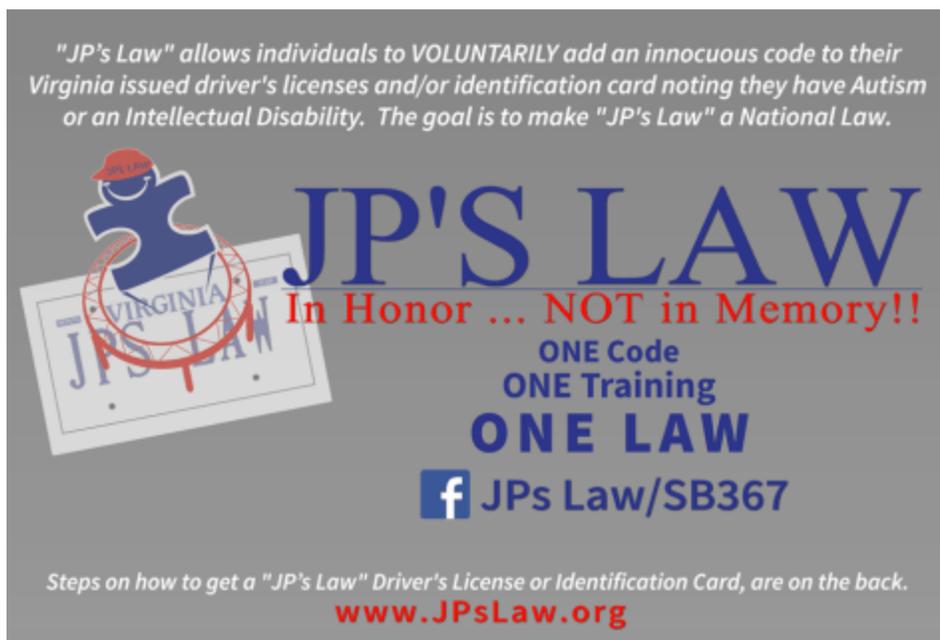
With JP’s Law, Pam Mines hopes to save lives within the special needs community by the usage of one card, one code, and one source of training for law enforcement across the nation. This keeps things simple and encourages open communication throughout the two groups.

“I wanted to do something in honor of my son, not in memory of him.” Mines told the crowd during her TED talk “Learning to See Unseen Communities.”

Currently, there are around 1,169 people with a JP's Law ID or driver's license throughout the state of Virginia. Along the way, Pam also helps train local law enforcement to educate them about the behaviors and reactions of the special needs community.

Throughout the process of creating JP's Law, Mines realized the impact of creating the law reached far beyond the special needs community. Mines learned about the importance of diversity throughout the community and giving everyone the opportunity to be heard, even if you don't see them regularly in your own circle.

During her TED talk "Learning to See Unseen Communities", she explained this sentiment in three words: respect, consider, and remember. She reminded the audience to respect, consider, and remember groups throughout our communities that we may not see often whether they're in attendance or not, including the special needs community, "We need to always respect, consider, and remember the unseen communities because they are not hiding. We just need to learn how to see them."



To further expand the outreach towards the local special needs community, Mines founded the JP Jumpers foundation. The goal of the foundation is to "JumP in" and increase the awareness of the special needs community locally. JP Jumpers hosts a variety of events throughout the community including coming together with community group BlackRVA to feed the homeless and hosting free events at Jumpology for children with

intellectual disabilities. On April 28th, the foundation is partnering with Aetna Better Health of Virginia to host their 3rd annual JP JumPers #LIUB 3K Autism Walk and Festival. The foundation will join with the men and women of the Richmond Police Department in the walk, with it ending at the Science Museum of Virginia. In honor of Autism Awareness Month, the building will light up in blue in order to "show solidarity between the special needs and law enforcement communities while supporting autism."

Registering for this event can be done [here](#).

If you're interested in learning more about JP's Law and obtaining a JP's Law identification card or driver's license, [you can learn more here](#). You can also follow Pam Mines throughout social media on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#).

**This article was published on March 13, 2019 and can be found on-line at <https://urbanviewsweekly.com/2019/03/11/jps-law-protects-people-with-special-needs-in-virginia/>