

DISABLED DRIVERS

CURBING MISUSE OF PARKING PERMITS FOR DISABLED

ERNIE BERTOTHY: Welcome to DMV Infocast, an audio production of the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. This is Ernie Bertothy, Infocast editor.

With us today is **Nancy Dumais**, the Division Manager who oversees the agency's distribution and regulation of parking permits for disabled motorists here in Connecticut. The State of Connecticut has recently taken steps to further curb misuses of these placards and Nancy is here to discuss this issue with us today.

ERNIE: Nancy, thank you very much for joining us today. And with this topic, I always think of when I go to a supermarket, and I'm walking through the parking lot, and I'm walking towards the establishment, sometimes I see the person and I wonder if they are really supposed to be parking in a spot that is reserved for somebody that is disabled, which leads me to my first question: How does the DMV get notification that somebody may be misusing their parking placard?

NANCY: They get that information from state and local law enforcement, the colleges, and concerned citizens.

ERNIE: Okay, and when we do find out this information, what are we doing to minimize or reduce this misuse of the placard?

NANCY: What we found is that abuse is most prevalent on the colleges. So we have sent a letter out to all the colleges asking for their cooperation helping us with this problem. We have also sent a letter out to all handicap placard holders asking them to be mindful of the use of their permit and reminding them about their responsibilities regarding its use.

ERNIE: Now that is what we are doing externally. What is our agency doing internally to help move this process along?

NANCY: Internally, we're comparing some of our files, one being our deceased file, and we've sent letters out to all the placard holders telling them that that permit has been canceled. We've also set up a system internally to revoke handicap placards that are misused.

ERNIE: And how does the system work? You talked about the deceased file. Can you just talk a little bit more about this system to revoke the placards?

NANCY: Sure. Basically, when we get a ticket in from law enforcement that shows that handicap placard has been abused, we send a letter out to the individual notifying them that we did receive information from local law enforcement that the placard has been misused and that we will be revoking the permit. Of course, the individual has a right to be heard, as with anything with the Department of Motor Vehicles, and if they request a hearing we will honor that.

ERNIE: Just in this past legislative session, there had been some items passed that have also helped us with curbing this misuse. Can you talk about the recent legislation that was passed?

NANCY: Absolutely. The recent legislation that was passed has now reduced the issuance of handicap placards from two per person to one per person. And I believe that that will drastically reduce the misuse because now the one placard that is issued will have to stay with the individual that truly needs it. I believe the problem comes into play with the second placard where they're not keeping track of it and other individuals are taking that permit and misusing it, many cases where the handicap individual isn't even aware of the misuse.

ERNIE: And if I'm a concerned citizen, like you mentioned earlier, what can I do if I think I see someone that might be misusing the placard?

NANCY: What you should do is directly notify your state or local law enforcement.

We certainly don't want to be put in a position where we're accusing individuals of wrongdoing when we don't have any solid proof of that. So my suggestion would be that you contact state or local law enforcement. The Department, as I mentioned earlier, is sending a letter out to all handicap placard holders reminding them of their responsibilities and the possibility for revocation if misuse occurred.

ERNIE: And one thing I always think you need to keep in mind, Nancy, sometimes there are people that perhaps don't look disabled but actually are. Could you just talk about some of the misconceptions that sometimes people might have?

NANCY: Sure. That's absolutely correct. We do get complaints in here and what we found is that a lot of the complaints that come in, the individual is truly handicapped, it's just not physically apparent to the individual that's looking at the person. You could have some sort of a chronic condition that impairs your ability to walk. It's not necessarily a physical impairment that may be visual to other individuals.

ERNIE: And Nancy, now that we've kind of gone over exactly what the DMV is currently doing to curb misuse, is the DMV doing anything to improve the system for the future?

NANCY: Absolutely, Ernie. What we're trying to do is develop an electronic process where we can receive the information directly from the physician's office. That will do a number of things. We will better service our customers because we'll reduce the mailing time that we currently have, and it will also negate the possibility of fraudulent signatures on the initial applications that we receive.

ERNIE: Well, Nancy, thank you very much for joining us today and educating us on what the DMV is doing to curb this misuse.

NANCY: Thank you, Ernie. It's been my pleasure.

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