The fraudulent use of disability license plates and parking placards is a matter I take very seriously. Medical professionals play an integral role in preventing the abuse of parking privileges for persons with disabilities by ensuring that a patient is qualified before approving him or her for disability plates or a parking placard.

With assistance from the Rush University Medical Center Americans with Disabilities Act Task Force in Chicago, my office developed this brochure to help medical professionals better understand the program and to determine whether a person meets the requirements to obtain special parking privileges. Included is detailed information on program eligibility and the application process, as well as guidelines for the use of disability parking spaces and penalties for the misuse and abuse of disability plates and parking placards.

The Parking Program for Persons with Disabilities is vital to many Illinois residents with disabilities to help them maintain their independence and stay active. By working with medical professionals, disability organizations and the law enforcement community, we can ensure that those who qualify for special parking privileges have the access they deserve.

Jesse White
Secretary of State
PARKING PROGRAM FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
A GUIDE FOR MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

Facts You Should Know
• A physician's signature is required on an application to obtain disability license plates or a parking placard.
• More than 600,000 people in Illinois have been issued permanent parking placards, and more than 40,000 are issued temporary parking placards annually.
• Each day, more than 400 people apply for disability license plates or parking placards.

Program Eligibility
A person with a disability or impairment is not automatically eligible for disability plates or a parking placard. When considering a patient's eligibility for disability plates or a parking placard, a licensed physician must certify that the patient's disability meets at least one of the following requirements. A patient must:
• be restricted by lung disease to such a degree that his or her forced respiratory volume (FEV) in one second, when measured by spirometry, is less than one liter; or
• use portable oxygen; or
• have a Class III or Class IV cardiac condition according to the standards set by the American Heart Association; or
• when walking, require the assistance of another person, prosthetic device, wheelchair or other assistive device; or
• have an arthritic, neurological or orthopedic condition that severely limits the person's ability to walk.

Note: “Cannot walk 200 feet without stopping to rest” is not a qualifying disability unless it is related to one of the above conditions.

Application Process
After certifying that a patient meets one of the above approved medical conditions, a licensed physician must:
• Specify the appropriate length of the disability — either permanent or temporary. If temporary, the physician must state the duration of the disability, which may not be more than six months.
• Sign the application and include his or her physician's license number.
• Include physician's name, address and telephone number.

Applications are available at Secretary of State Driver Services facilities, at www.cyberdriveillinois.com, or by contacting: Secretary of State, Persons with Disabilities License Plates/Placard Unit, 501 S. Second St., Rm. 541, Springfield, IL 62756, 800-252-2904.

Physicians who knowingly misuse the application process or who make false statements to help someone obtain disability plates or a parking placard may be fined up to $1,000.

Parking Placards
A parking placard may only be used in a vehicle in which the authorized holder of the placard is driving or is a passenger. Three types of parking placards are available from the Secretary of State's office:
• Permanent Placards are issued to persons with permanent disabilities. The placards are valid for four years and expire in 2010 on the last day of the month of the holder's birth month.
• Temporary Placards are valid for the length of time indicated by the certifying physician, not to exceed six months if issued by the Secretary of State. Local municipalities may issue temporary placards, which are valid for up to 90 days.
• Organization Placards are issued to organizations that transport persons with disabilities. These placards expire on April 30, 2010. No physician signature is required for an organization placard.

Disability License Plates
The major difference between disability plates and permanent parking placards is that the plates must stay permanently affixed to the vehicle for which they were issued.

• Disability plates are issued only to persons with permanent disabilities who own a vehicle and have their name on the vehicle title, or a parent or legal guardian of a minor with a disability.
• Disabled Veteran plates are issued only to veterans who have a 100 percent service-related disability.

Parking Privileges
• Vehicles properly displaying disability plates or a parking placard may park in spaces reserved for persons with disabilities and are exempt from parking meter fees or time limitations on parking, except at meters, signs or other markings with time limitations of 30 minutes or less.
• Vehicles may not park in access aisles or areas where parking is prohibited. Vehicles also are prohibited from parking in any manner that creates a traffic hazard.
• Parking privileges apply only when the authorized holder of the disability plates or parking placard is present.

Penalties for Misuse
Effective Jan. 1, 2006, the minimum fine for parking in a space reserved for persons with disabilities without plates or a placard increased to $250. Local municipalities may increase the fine to $350 through adoption of a local ordinance. Unauthorized use of disability plates or parking placards may result in a $500 fine and driver's license suspension for a first offense. Police officers also may confiscate a placard, and the Secretary of State’s office may suspend or revoke plates or placards being used illegally.

Following are Class A misdemeanors for a first offense and may result in a fine of up to $2,500 and driver's license suspension. Violators may be charged with a Class 4 felony for a second offense.
• Altering a parking placard.
• Possessing a fake, fraudulent, lost or stolen placard.
• Duplicating or manufacturing a placard.
• Selling or otherwise distributing a fraudulent placard.

In addition, parking in a metered space using disability plates or a parking placard without the authorized holder present may result in a fine of $500 and driver's license suspension.