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CITY OF CHICAGO TO BEGIN ENFORCING NEW PARKING LAW THURSDAY

The City of Chicago will begin enforcing a new Illinois law narrowing the use of disability parking placards starting Thursday. The law allows free metered parking only for drivers who receive placards based on their doctor's attesting that they meet certain criteria as defined in the law.

While the new state law took effect January 1st, Mayor Rahm Emanuel offered a 15-day grace period to allow motorists to become aware of the new law. Beginning Thursday, anyone ticketed for violating the new law in the Central Business District (CBD) will receive a \$65 fine. Violations in areas outside the CBD will be \$50.

The new Secretary of State-issued yellow and gray placards will allow qualified drivers to park for free at a meter. Blue placards will still be issued and will entitle people to park in parking lots, but they will not be permitted to park for free in metered spots.

According to previous state law, cars with any type of disabled placard were allowed to park at a meter for free for an unlimited period of time. To qualify for a new yellow and gray placard, drivers must have their doctor attest that they cannot do one of the following:

- Feed parking meters "due to the lack of fine motor control of both hands."
- Feed meters because they need to use a wheelchair.
- Reach above their heads "to a height of 42 inches above the ground."
- Walk more than 20 feet due to an orthopedic, neurological, cardiovascular or lung condition."

Mayor Emanuel, who supported the legislation sponsored by Illinois State Rep. Karen May, has continued to look into ways to improve the metered parking program for those with disabled parking placards and licenses, while cracking down on those who abuse the program.

The City – working with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and the Chicago Police Department – conducted stings throughout the past year under the existing law that targeted disabled parking abuse where it was verified that the placard user matched the registered name on the placard. In 16-18 percent of cases, the City confiscated placards because they weren't being used legally and/or by the individual to which they were issued.

The Illinois Secretary of State sent letters to all current Illinois disability placard holders informing them of the changes in the law. In addition to that, the City of Chicago implemented a comprehensive outreach plan to notify motorists about the shift in the law. In August, the City issued 4,500 yellow warning flyers throughout the central business district and residential neighborhoods to vehicles displaying blue placards or disability license plates. Earlier this month, the City distributed 5,000 orange flyers again to vehicles in the same parking areas, and last week posters were put up throughout the City at bus shelters, metered boxes, senior centers, and hospitals, to make people aware of the new law. Those posters display pictures of the old placards so drivers know the difference.

For more information about placards for motorists with disabilities, visit www.cyberdriveillinois.com.

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