



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

News for Immediate Release

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New Statewide Partnership Focuses on Autism Awareness and Education in the Courts

Offers information for families during COVID-19 pandemic

HARRISBURG — The Pennsylvania Supreme Court, along with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS), is launching a statewide initiative focused on helping judges better understand and communicate with individuals with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

The initiative is a first-of-its-kind partnership and will provide practical guidance, best practices and resources to judges managing cases involving an individual with autism as well as court information and services for families.

“Education and awareness are the cornerstones of this initiative and a key component in ensuring the courts and our communities are accessible to all users and their families,” said Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty. “Initiatives such as this bring everyone to the table to learn from each other.”

“We are grateful for the opportunity to be part of the type of positive change that will directly impact families all across Pennsylvania.”

With nearly one in 59 children diagnosed with an ASD*, judges hearing cases in criminal, juvenile, orphans’, family court, etc. are sure to have individuals living with autism come before them.

As part of these efforts, the Pennsylvania Courts are partnering with:

- DHS Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) –
- Autism Services, Education, Resources and Training (ASERT)
- Philadelphia Autism Project

"April is Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month, and it is critically important that our justice system has what it needs to protect the vulnerable populations that it serves," said Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller. "DHS works tirelessly to ensure that people with autism have a right to an everyday life. We are proud to be partnering with the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to provide Pennsylvania's justice system with the information and resources it needs to guarantee this right."

As part of this effort, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the courts have added information and resources for families supporting an individual with autism on the Pennsylvania Courts frequently asked questions [page](#).

For more information about the joint effort and services and support for individuals with autism visit ASERT (Autism Services Education Resources and Training) at <https://paautism.org/resource/justice/>.

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**Statistic from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network, 2018*