



## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

### News for Immediate Release

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#### **Pennsylvania Supreme Court, Department of Human Services to Hold Statewide Discussions about Autism in the Courts**

**HARRISBURG** — Committed to access to justice for Pennsylvanians with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, along with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS), today announced plans for regional discussions aimed at learning about court experiences from individuals with an ASD.

Spearheaded by Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty on behalf of the Court, the virtual kick-off roundtable will be held Nov. 17, with regionally scheduled discussions to follow.

“Earlier this year, the Supreme Court signaled its commitment to Pennsylvanians with autism by forming a first-of-its-kind partnership with the Department of Human Services to heighten our focus on helping judges better understand and communicate with individuals with an ASD,” said Justice Dougherty.

“Education and awareness are critical to ensuring we are providing for the needs of all court users, especially those with an ASD,” Dougherty said. “The more we learn, the more we grow as a system and as a community, but most importantly in our ability to be part of the type of positive change that will impact Pennsylvania families.”

Each virtual forum will feature representatives from the judiciary, law enforcement, healthcare, social work and advocacy communities along with those living with and/or supporting someone with an ASD. Through the discussions, the Court and DHS will hear first-hand about challenges faced in regions across the state from providers and individuals with autism alike as they seek access to justice.

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.

In addition, 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*