

Pennsylvania's Autism and the Courts Initiative

What is Autism?

Autism is a complex neurological condition that individuals are born with – it is not acquired, and individuals do not outgrow autism. People with autism can experience challenges in social, communication and behavioral development.

What is the Autism and the Courts Initiative?

Pennsylvania's Autism and the Courts initiative is focused on reducing trauma and supporting individuals in the court system with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) by recognizing, accepting and responding to the needs of all court users and their families.

Highlights:

Over 1,000 PA judges received training on autism.

Over 1,200 individuals across the state attended public dialogue forums.

Over 2,000 court and child welfare professionals trained across the state

564 people served with autism since data collection began

Autism Benchcard created for Dependency Court judges

Statistics:

One in 36 children have been diagnosed with autism.



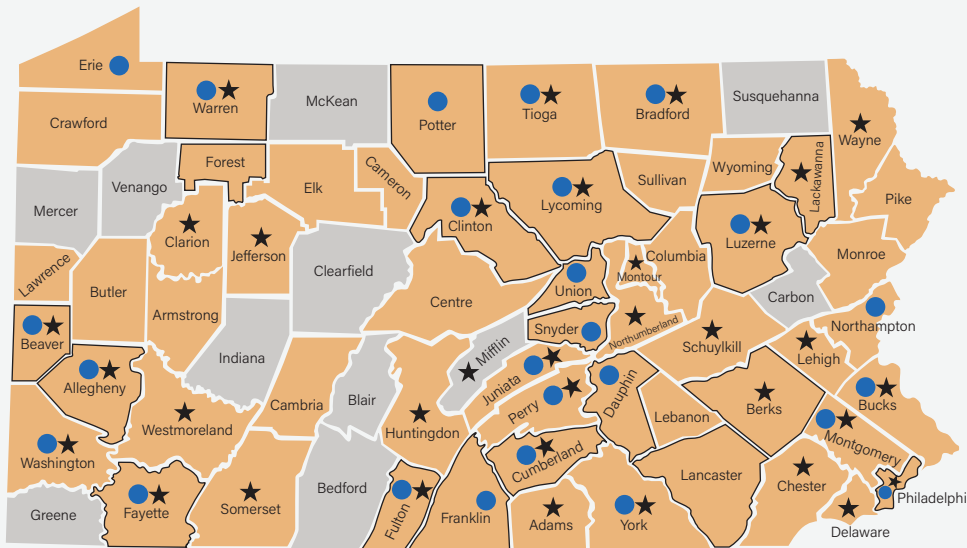
Five million

U.S. adults have been diagnosed with autism.

Autistic individuals are **7x more likely** to be justice involved.

Number of autistic individuals in PA receiving services has **doubled** in recent years.

Autism in the Courts Progress:



- 56 Counties participating
- 34 Counties collecting autism data through CPCMS
- 19 Counties created social stories
- 25 Counties have prioritized the autism initiative
- 12 counties have created courthouse calming/sensory rooms
- 30 counties use Sensory Bags in their courtrooms

Initiative Timeline:

- 2020**
Virtual statewide roundtable kickoff; held 4-hour training for trial judges
- 2021**
Established Autism and the Courts Dependency Taskforce; five virtual regional roundtables held; started focus on dependency court
- 2022**
Created several Dependency Court tools; began development on data collection
- 2023**
New logo developed; community education tour; training for 600+ attorneys; training for 500+ MDJ's
- 2024**
Parole Board training; Provided sensory items to courts; Supported Autism Acceptance month; expanded into Juvenile Justice.