



## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

### NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 5, 2022

#### **Pennsylvania Courts Launch Month-Long Effort to Celebrate Autism Acceptance in the Court System**

**HARRISBURG** – With April designated as Autism Acceptance Month, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania is promoting autism acceptance throughout the court system and encouraging judges and staff to join them in the effort.

“One in 44 children and one in 56 adults in Pennsylvania are diagnosed with autism,” said Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty. “We need to move to a place where everyone is accepted and celebrated for who they are and offered the help they need, when they need it the most.”

In a strong show of support for autism awareness and acceptance from the court system, under the leadership of Justice Dougherty on behalf of the Supreme Court, the [court website](#) has been turned blue, the universal color associated with Autism Acceptance Month.

In addition, Dougherty is calling on his judicial colleagues, statewide partners and the public to join him in support of those with autism by wearing blue on April 12<sup>th</sup>. Those joining in the effort are encouraged to post their photos in blue on the Pennsylvania Courts Twitter page [@PaCourts](#) and use the hashtag #PaAutismAcceptance.

Throughout the month the courts will also be sharing information about autism and resources, services and support available statewide through its social media channels (Twitter -- [@PaCourts](#), Facebook [@Pennsylvaniacourts](#)) and [website](#).

“We want everyone to know – that when you enter our courtrooms from Erie to Philadelphia – everyone is welcome, everyone is seen, heard and accepted – and there’s no better feeling than that, Dougherty said.

Let’s show all of Pennsylvania that we care and be the force of support behind our children and their families.”

In 2020, the Supreme Court signaled its commitment to Pennsylvanians with autism by forming a first-of-its-kind partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to heighten the focus on helping judges better understand the necessary evaluations required for diagnosis, treatment and services for individuals with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). More than 200 judges attended the first in-person training session held that year, indicating the interest and the need for the courts to focus on ASD.

Committed to moving the initiative forward, Dougherty and DHS developed a statewide virtual listening tour to hear first-hand about challenges faced in the system from medical professionals, service providers and individuals with autism alike as they sought access to justice.

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

Since that time, Justice Dougherty has partnered with the Pennsylvania Courts' Office of Children and Families in the Courts to create a taskforce known as the Autism in the Courts Taskforce. The taskforce is focused on providing increased training opportunities for judges, helping further identify gaps in the system for individuals with autism and intellectual disabilities and creating a local roadmap to resources and services.

For more information about the Autism and the Courts effort visit <https://www.pacourts.us/learn/autism-and-the-courts>.

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**Media contact:** [Stacey Witalec](#), 717-877-2997