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## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

### News for Immediate Release

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#### **Pennsylvania Supreme Court, Department of Human Services Address Access to Justice for Pennsylvanians with Autism**

**HARRISBURG** — Focused on providing for the needs of Pennsylvanians with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, along with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS), will hold a virtual forum to address access to justice issues in Philadelphia and the surrounding counties.

The discussion is the first in a five-part regional series aimed at learning about court experiences from individuals with an ASD. A statewide virtual kick-off event was held in Nov., setting the stage for the regional listening tour.

Spearheaded by Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty on behalf of the Court, the virtual event will be held Jan. 26 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The event will be available for the public to view and submit comments and questions via court social media pages (Twitter @[PACourts](#) or Facebook @[pennsylvaniacourts](#)).

“These regional conversations are so critical, not just to the judiciary but to the people coming through the court system every day,” Dougherty said. “Decisions made in our courtrooms directly affect someone’s future and we owe it to them and to ourselves to make sure that we understand how to best help them.

“We need to do more listening and open ourselves up to new perspectives and when we do, I’m confident we’ll learn things about each other that will help us implement positive, lasting change for Pennsylvanians living with an ASD.”

Participating in the virtual forum are:

- Aliko Koumenis, Self-advocate living with autism
- Philadelphia Councilman and family advocate Derek Greene
- Roz Talley, Philadelphia Police Department and family advocate
- Jack Stollsteimer, Delaware County District Attorney
- Judge Kelly Wall, Montgomery County Court of Common Please
- Judge Chris Mallios, Philadelphia Family Court

- Judge Charlie Ehrlich, Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, Criminal Division
- Judge Sheila Woods-Skipper, Administrative Judge, Orphans Court, Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas
- Kim Ali, Philadelphia Children's Human Services System
- Jill Bowen, Ph.D., Commissioner, Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services
- Laura Deriggi, Sr. Director, Clinical Consultation, Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health

Through the discussion, the Court and DHS will hear first-hand about challenges faced in Philadelphia and the surrounding counties 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.

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](#).

Those interested in viewing the virtual forum, including media and the public may register [here](#).

For more information about this 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*