



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).

According to the latest numbers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, now one in 36 Pennsylvania children and more than five million adults nationwide are diagnosed with autism.

On behalf of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, Justice Kevin Dougherty is committed to ensuring Pennsylvania's courts are prepared to recognize, accept and meet the needs of all court users and their families.

Why does it matter:

Pennsylvania is the first and only state in the nation focused on creating meaningful change for those with an ASD coming through the court system.

In Pennsylvania alone the number of autistic individuals receiving services from the state has more than doubled in recent years, and research shows that individuals on the spectrum are almost seven times more likely to come into contact with the justice system, often with adverse consequences.

Since the beginning of this initiative, our motto has been **Listen. Learn. Educate.** Today, we now have judges,

attorneys, court staff, human services agencies and advocates working together as they listen, learn and educate each other on a path to implementing lasting change.

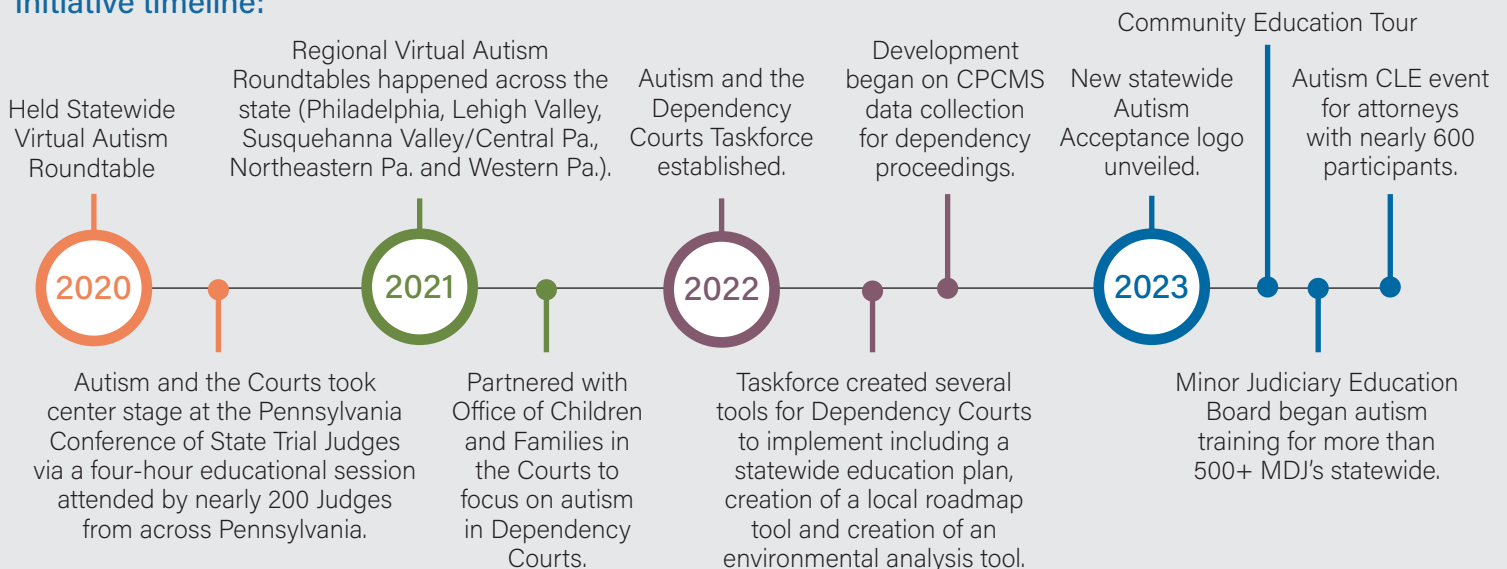
This initiative illustrates how progress can come out of government entities collaborating for a common good, and it could possibly even serve as a template for other states and jurisdictions looking to tackle this issue or any similar one in the justice system.

Taking action:

The long-reaching, positive effects of the initiative have led to reform in the areas of mental/behavioral health, trauma and court services/understanding for all those who are neurodiverse coming through our courthouse doors. Courts statewide are embracing the initiative and are focused on learning about autism, reducing trauma and implementing changes to help support those with ASD as they navigate the court system.

- Using data to inform and guide system reform
- Videos to prepare for court
- Social stories for children
- Sensory rooms in courthouses for children and parents

Initiative timeline:



Learn more at pacourts.us/learn/autism-in-the-courts.