



News for Immediate Release

April 28, 2025

Pennsylvania's Autism and the Courts Initiative Civics Ed One Pager

HARRISBURG -- In recognition of Autism Acceptance Month, Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty, on behalf of the Supreme Court, provided updates on the Court's autism initiative.

Launched in 2020 and known as Autism in the Courts, the initiative is focused on reducing trauma and supporting individuals in the court system with an autism spectrum disorder by recognizing, accepting and responding to the needs of courts users and their families.

"Five years ago, we became the first state in the nation to start a conversation about autism in our courts, to address the tough questions that would lead to important and lasting change within our system for court-involved, neurodiverse families and their children," Justice Dougherty said.

"On their behalf, we felt a shared responsibility to fix the gaps in the system.

"Today we've added this information to the courts civics education toolkit so that students, teachers, media and the public can learn more about the work and the role of the courts, especially in areas where we focus on ensuring justice is accessible to all court users."

According to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control, one in 31 children will be diagnosed with autism before age eight.

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

###

Media contact: [Olivia Antonucci](#), 609-238-5182

Pennsylvanian'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

557 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.



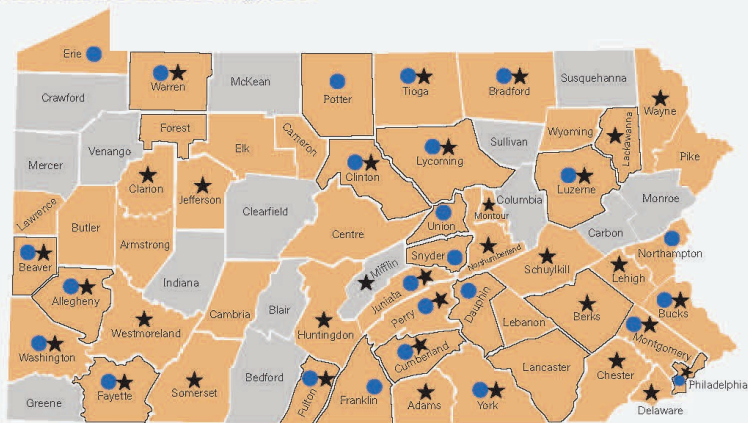
Number of autistic individuals in PA receiving services has **doubled** in recent years.

Five million

U.S. adults have been diagnosed with autism.

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

Autism in the Courts Progress:



52 Counties participating

19 Counties created social stories

34 Counties collecting autism data through CPCMS

24 Counties have prioritized the autism initiative

12 counties have created courthouse calming/sensory rooms

25 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+ MDJs
- 2024**
Parole Board training; Provided sensory items to courts; Supported Autism Acceptance month; expanded into Juvenile Justice.

Learn more at pacourts.us/learn.

AOPC
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS