



# **AUTISM-FRIENDLY PRACTICES**

## For Law Enforcement



# Autism New Jersey

## MISSION

Autism New Jersey drives statewide change and creates connections through compassionate support, expert guidance, and a deep commitment to an autism-friendly New Jersey.

## VISION

A New Jersey where people with autism thrive in their daily lives within fully supportive communities.

## VALUES

Compassionate | Hopeful | Collaborative | Innovative | Dedicated



# Table Of Contents

## Autism New Jersey's Law Enforcement Initiative

Autism New Jersey's Law Enforcement Initiative is a multi-phase endeavor designed to increase the adoption of autism-friendly law enforcement practices.

---

## Letters from Leadership

Our Statewide Commitment to Safety and Understanding | Dr. Suzanne Buchanan | Executive Director  
Advancing Awareness and Collaboration | Doreen A. Yanik, Esq. | Law Enforcement Initiative Director

---

## Autism-Friendly Practices

Through research and networking, Autism New Jersey has identified numerous autism-friendly practices designed to increase the likelihood of safe and positive interactions between law enforcement and the autism community.

---

## Training

Training is an important tool to guide law enforcement on how to respond to a given situation and ensure that appropriate de-escalation techniques are employed to ensure a safe and positive interaction.

---

## Our Law Enforcement Advisory Committee

Advisory committee members serve as subject-matter experts and have routinely assisted other law enforcement agencies in raising autism awareness and supporting practice implementation.

---

## Get In Touch

We welcome the opportunity to connect with you. Take our survey, join our SAFE Network, or contact us with any questions.

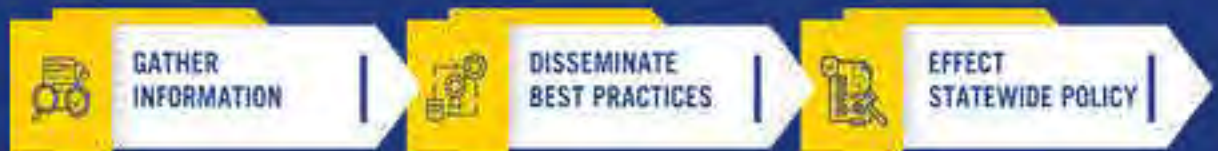
---



In February 2024, Autism New Jersey formally launched its Law Enforcement Initiative, a multi-phase endeavor designed to increase the adoption of autism-friendly law enforcement practices. Funded in large part by the New Jersey State Bar Foundation, Autism New Jersey collaborates with individuals and entities in law enforcement at municipal, county, and state levels to advance the goals of safe and positive interactions between law enforcement and the autism community.

The complexity of this initiative demands a thoughtful approach and includes the following components: subject-matter expertise, extensive information gathering, and substantial relationship development, all designed to establish a network and processes that will increase communication and safety for all involved.

Our most sincere appreciation to the New Jersey State Bar Foundation for its support and funding of Autism New Jersey's Law Enforcement Initiative.



# *Our goal: Increase statewide adoption of autism-friendly law enforcement practices*

---

## **Our multi-phase approach has resulted in:**

- Establishment of our Law Enforcement Advisory Committee (LEAC) consisting of subject-matter law enforcement experts from the State Police, County Prosecutors' Offices, Sheriffs' Offices, and corrections as well as chiefs and officers from local police departments
- Creation of topical sub-committees, designed to address specific challenges faced by the autism and law enforcement communities, including training, driving-related considerations, registries (including search and rescue), and home-based interactions
- Formation of the Supporting Autism-Friendly Enforcement (SAFE) Network consisting of individuals and departments in New Jersey doing exemplary work who are willing to share their practices with other law enforcement agencies
- Development of the Law Enforcement Autism Planning Sessions (LEAPS) program, a free-of-charge service for municipal- and county-level leaders in law enforcement in which Autism New Jersey provides consultation, connections to subject-matter experts, and assistance in implementation on how to be more autism friendly
- Dissemination of autism-friendly practices and spotlighting law enforcement agencies that have successfully and enthusiastically implemented these practices

**The ever-present goal remains the adoption and expansion of autism-friendly practices statewide.**

# OUR STATEWIDE COMMITMENT TO SAFETY AND UNDERSTANDING

Autism New Jersey is a nonprofit organization dedicated to championing the rights, well-being, and quality of life of individuals with autism across the state. We believe in the power of informed and connected communities to create lasting change.

Since 1965, Autism New Jersey has been a catalyst for statewide change. The safety of individuals with autism is paramount to our mission, especially because they are often misunderstood and vulnerable. With the implementation of the Law Enforcement Initiative, we are leveraging our agency's service navigation, clinical, and policy expertise as well as our statewide autism awareness and healthcare efforts to ensure we meet the diverse and nuanced needs of autism and law enforcement communities.

We invite you to join New Jersey's autism community in this first-of-its-kind Law Enforcement Initiative.

## What prompted us to take on such an ambitious statewide effort?

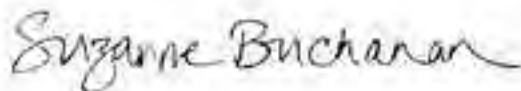
- An increase in calls to our 800.4.AUTISM Helpline from *families* who shared their stories in detail – both lifesaving and tragic
- An increase in calls to our 800.4.AUTISM Helpline from *law enforcement officers* who were seeking training, opportunities to connect with colleagues, and statewide coordination
- My service on the Attorney General's Mental Health and Special Needs Steering Committee that increased our awareness of law enforcement structure and functions

The challenges faced by both communities on their own and in combination require thoughtful solutions that bring people together and acknowledge that there are numerous stakeholders involved. No one solution will be enough to support the needs of these two communities. Autism New Jersey remains committed to both the autism and law enforcement communities and welcomes all ideas and connections to advance this initiative on behalf of individuals with autism.

And there's so much more ahead...

At Autism New Jersey, we are more than just a resource for autism-friendly law enforcement practices—we are a partner, an advocate, and a leader in the journey toward a more inclusive society for all.

**We look forward to working with you!**



**Suzanne Buchanan**

Psy.D., BCBA-D

Executive Director

# ADVANCING AWARENESS AND COLLABORATION

I am incredibly honored to serve as Director of Autism New Jersey's Law Enforcement Initiative. In 2023, after more than 28 years of service, I retired from the Union County Prosecutor's Office, where among varied roles, I advocated extensively and implemented autism training for in-service law enforcement professionals and for police academy recruits. During my tenure, I was also honored to serve as both Deputy First Assistant and First Assistant Prosecutor within administrations committed to community outreach, increased law enforcement training, and implementation of policies and practices designed to ensure safe and positive interaction between law enforcement and the most vulnerable members of our community.

In late 2023, the opportunity arose to lead Autism New Jersey's Law Enforcement Initiative, one for which I have both passion and a broad vision. My law enforcement experience has provided me with insight into a community that is both willing and dedicated to effecting statewide change.

I am so excited to be in a role where I can make positive changes in the two worlds in which I live. This initiative is the perfect opportunity to be a part of raising awareness and implementing important practices. Through this initiative, we are bringing together autistic individuals, families, and the many layers of law enforcement to learn about current needs and efforts, identify key practices, and establish statewide standards.

I am proud to serve alongside such proactive and thoughtful law enforcement partners who demonstrate their daily commitment to making our communities safer. I am gratified by the work our initiative has accomplished so far and excited about the work yet to be done.

Change requires awareness and collaboration. **Please join us in this mission!**



CONNECT WITH US

800.4.AUTISM  
LE@autismnj.org  
www.autismnj.org/LE



**Doreen A. Yanik**

Esq.

Law Enforcement Initiative Director



NICE





# AUTISM-FRIENDLY PRACTICES

Through research and networking, Autism New Jersey has identified numerous autism-friendly practices designed to increase the likelihood of safe and positive interactions between law enforcement and the autism community. Some of these practices are proactive, and others are more “in-the-moment.”

The practices contained herein are not intended to be an exhaustive list, but ones considered most appropriate for inclusion in this publication and were operational for the highlighted departments at the time of this publication.

- County Mental Health & Special Needs Working Group
- Identified Autism-Friendly Liaison/Contact
- Special Needs Registry
- Blue Envelope
- ID and Contact and Emergency Cards
- Mock Pull-Overs
- Seatbelt Covers and Magnets/Decals on Car
- Community Events
- Locative Technology
- Effective Communication
- Supportive Environment
- Autism and Law Enforcement Community Connections



As the Chair of the Hunterdon County Prosecutor's Office's Mental Health and Special Needs Population Working Group, I work closely with our Community Outreach Liaison, Samatha Iraca.

Meetings are organized on a quarterly basis by Samatha, who does an exceptional job with scheduling presenters from different agencies to speak about their services and programs offered to the mental health/specials needs community. The meetings are enlightening, and they provide agencies with information to cross reference when varied services are needed.



For instance, retired Tewksbury Police Chief Timothy Barlow presented on the Blue Envelope Program, which assists drivers on the Autism Spectrum. The presentation resulted in the expansion of Blue Envelope at Hunterdon Behavioral Health and a redesign of the envelope to securely hold driving credentials. The hospital also reproduced copies of the envelope in Spanish to meet the needs of our Spanish speaking communities.

**Our office is proud of what has been accomplished through the work of the quarterly group meetings and we are hopeful for continued success**

**| Senior Assistant Prosecutor Tangerla Thomas**  
Chair of the Hunterdon County Working Group



# LAW ENFORCEMENT'S ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTY WORKING GROUPS IS AN IMPORTANT AUTISM-FRIENDLY PRACTICE



# County Mental Health & Special Needs Working Group

## (With Autism Representation)



In its ongoing commitment to excellence in policing and community outreach, the New Jersey Executive branch has continuously sought to identify and bring stakeholders to the table for thoughtful and multi-disciplinary approaches to, among many goals, effect safe law enforcement interaction with the most vulnerable members of our community. One such example is the New Jersey Office of Attorney General Directive 2020-14, entitled “Establishing Countywide Working Groups to Address Mental Health and Special Needs Populations and Creating a Framework for Coordination with State Partners,” issued on December 21, 2020.

The Directive required all 21 counties to create countywide working groups to improve law enforcement interactions with special needs populations and those living with mental or behavioral health issues. Each working group includes representation from various disciplines, including but not limited to, law enforcement and special needs providers and advocates. The autism community is represented within the working groups. The groups are charged with reviewing and improving local policies and resources designed to assist law enforcement in their interaction with persons in crisis, including members of the autism community. Each county working group is headed by a chair who also serves as a liaison to the Statewide Steering Committee. Autism New Jersey’s Executive Director, Dr. Suzanne Buchanan, serves as a member of the Statewide Steering Committee and works to ensure autism representation within the county working groups.

Law enforcement’s active involvement in their respective county working groups is an important autism-friendly practice. An example of an extremely proactive group, with an emphasis on autism-friendly practices, is Hunterdon County’s Mental Health and Special Needs Working Group, chaired by Senior Assistant Prosecutor Tangerla Thomas. In addition to the incredible work this county group has accomplished with Crisis Intervention Team training, the Arrive Together program, and the mental health and veteran population, Hunterdon County was in the forefront in bringing together stakeholders to promote autism-friendly practices. One such example is the Blue Envelope, as first launched in New Jersey in Hunterdon County by law enforcement and further enhanced through a partnership with other working group member organizations.

# A DESIGNATED AUTISM-FRIENDLY LIAISON SERVES A CRUCIAL ROLE IN ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE AUTISM COMMUNITY



Serving as a county liaison as a lieutenant in the implementation of a county wide

Special Needs Registry in Middlesex County was very important because it allowed us as law enforcement officers environment for everyone. This program allows us to build bridges of trust between the community and those who protect it. As the Special Needs Liaison, I prioritized spreading awareness about the Special Needs Registry from the moment it launched, ensuring our community was informed and individuals were registered promptly.

This program allows us to build bridges of trust between the community and those who protect it

to not only serve, but to advocate and create a safer

In collaboration with local police departments and community partners, we organized and attended numerous outreach events across Middlesex County. These efforts allowed us to work closely with families, helping them understand the program and guiding them through the registration process for their loved ones. The response from the community has been overwhelmingly positive, with families expressing deep gratitude for this initiative, which provides them with a greater sense of security knowing law enforcement is aware and ready to assist.



To enhance the liaison role, I worked with my office to establish a Special Needs Registry LEO Working group, consisting of (county and municipal) officers who are deeply committed to the program and dedicated to raising awareness. With the collaboration of my colleagues at Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office, and law enforcement partners from South Plainfield PD, Edison PD, Rutgers' University PD, Highland Park PD, Old Bridge PD, and Dunellen PD, we are actively working to

enhance awareness and provide future training within the county.

| Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office Captain Grace Brown  
County Special Needs Liaison

# Identified Autism-Friendly Liaison/Contact



A designated autism-friendly liaison, typically as part of a law enforcement agency's community policing division, serves a crucial role in establishing relationships with the autism community and implementing and overseeing autism-friendly practices. Such a liaison is pivotal to the success of these practices. County liaisons coordinate with the liaisons in each of the municipalities within their jurisdiction to ensure open communication and the sharing of vital policy and practical information. Moreover, they provide a point of contact within law enforcement for the autism community.

A notable example of a county-level liaison is Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office's Captain Grace Brown who oversaw implementation of the county registry and associated training. She served as the connector for municipal police department liaisons within her county.





**REGISTRIES PROVIDE A VOLUNTARY OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM AND THEIR FAMILIES TO SHARE CRITICAL INFORMATION WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT**

**PNC BANK Arts Center**

**Love Someone With  
Special Needs?  
visit: [www.mcsnrnj.org](http://www.mcsnrnj.org)**



# Special Needs Registry



Registries provide a voluntary opportunity for individuals with autism and their families to share critical information with law enforcement that will assist law enforcement in a potential response situation. Ready access to critical information, including emergency contact(s), photographs, physical descriptions, diagnoses, medical issues, stress inducers and reducers, and effective forms of communication, helps law enforcement better respond in an emergency. This information is confidentially maintained in shared Computer Assisted Dispatch (CAD) systems through a centralized dispatch or with the help of an integrated dispatch system through vendors such as Online Policing Solutions (OPS). Having information in advance assists in de-escalation, safe encounters, and decreased anxiety for the individual and their families.



As the Chief law enforcement officer in Monmouth County, it is my priority, and by extension that of our office, to be at the forefront of protecting individuals with special needs. It is a great source of pride for our office that the Monmouth County Special Needs Registry is used as a model for similar programs not only here in New Jersey, but across the country, and even parts of Ontario, Canada.

Since I have taken the job as Prosecutor, I have stressed the need for our law enforcement agencies and members of our communities to work together to this end. The Registry is a shining example of that united effort, which includes our law enforcement partners across the County, including the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office under the direction of Sheriff Shaun Golden, the Monmouth County Police Chief's Association under the direction of its President, Highlands Police Chief Robert Burton, as well as all of our local law enforcement agencies.

However, that collaboration would not be possible without our Prosecutor's Office liaisons, who have consistently been the ones out in the community meeting our residents, educating the public on the importance of the Registry, as well as helping to equip our first responders with the tools necessary to understand what a registrant may be facing during a time of crisis. Congratulations to the entire Special Needs Registry Team for continuing to update and maintain this registry so that it upholds the very high standards that our communities deserve.

| Monmouth County Prosecutor Raymond S. Santiago



Pictured: Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office Detective Michelle Tucker, Prosecutor Raymond S. Santiago, Sergeant Shawn Murphy, and Executive Assistant Rachel Kibble





## COUNTY-WIDE REGISTRIES

In 2016, Monmouth County became the first New Jersey county to launch a registry. With a thoughtful, inclusive, and comprehensive approach, Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office's registry has served as the gold-standard for counties in New Jersey as well as nationally and internationally for subsequent regional registries.



## MUNICIPAL REGISTRIES

Many municipal police departments in New Jersey have proactively established their own localized programs to encourage information sharing and productive relationships with their local autism community. One such example is the Robbinsville Township Police Department's S.A.F.E. Team. Residents provide law enforcement with information necessary to inform an appropriate response. Their approach demonstrates the commitment of a local police department to engaging with their autism community and working to ensure their safety.



**Use of autism-friendly practices has resulted in a reduction in use-of-force incidents and helped create more positive outcomes for law enforcement and the autism community**



The Robbinsville Township Police Department has made a strong commitment to improving relations and interactions between our officers and the autistic community. Regarding the efforts to adopt autism-friendly practices like our S.A.F.E. Team, I would think that officers throughout the State will embrace it as a way to do their jobs better and to have a more powerful impact on this community. Use of autism-friendly practices has resulted in a reduction in use-of-force incidents and helped create more positive outcomes for law enforcement and the autism community.

| Robbinsville Township Police Chief Mike Polaski (ret.)



The Blue Envelope Program was created to enhance communication between the Police Officer and a Driver with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The Blue Envelope is a resealable and convenient place to keep all driver documents and contains instructions for both the driver and the interacting Police Officer in the event of a stop. The Blue Envelope Program introduces a simple yet effective tool that contains essential information for drivers with Autism Spectrum Disorder. This includes a copy of their driver's license, vehicle registration, insurance card, and contact card. This program will help bridge the gaps in communication and build empathy in the community.



| Passaic County Prosecutor Camelia Valdes

Thanks to the vision of Chief Brett Bartman and the outstanding work of Officer Brian Shipp, the Blue Envelope Program was successfully launched in Hunterdon County and has rapidly expanded across New Jersey. Their work was crucial in bringing this program to life, and without their contributions, its success would not have been possible. The program embodies a commitment to inclusivity and safety, and I am passionate about seeing its benefits reach even more communities.

| Chief Tim Barlow (ret.), Tewksbury Township Police Department  
Autism New Jersey LEAC Member



**THE INFORMATION ON THE ENVELOPE HELPS LAW ENFORCEMENT BY IDENTIFYING A DRIVER AS AUTISTIC AND PROVIDES GUIDANCE ON INTERACTION WITH THAT INDIVIDUAL**

# Blue Envelope



Monmouth County

The Blue Envelope was created to enhance communication between law enforcement and autistic drivers, and its primary goal is to assist autistic drivers with document organization and information about what to do during a motor vehicle stop. The information on the envelope helps law enforcement by identifying a driver as autistic and provides guidance on interaction with that individual. It is a convenient place to keep all driver-related documents (a copy of their driver's license, vehicle registration, insurance card, and contact card) and contains instructions for both the driver and the involved police officer in the event of a motor vehicle stop. It is a simple and effective tool that improves the likelihood of safe and positive interactions.

Through the work and dedication of the Hunterdon County Chiefs' Association, Hunterdon became the first county to implement the Blue Envelope and has served as the model for Blue Envelope programs throughout the state. In partnership with Hunterdon Health, Hunterdon County has increased dissemination and awareness of this tool. Passaic County Prosecutor's Office, with the cooperation of the Passaic County Chiefs' Association, implemented the most recent countywide Blue Envelope program in June 2024.



LEARN MORE



**911 Alert Form**  
2024-2025 School Year



**For Official Use Only:**

Name: Eric Doe  
Address: 123 Your Street  
Elizabeth, NJ 07208  
DOB: 07/04/1778  
Emergency Contact: Guardian Name  
Relationship: Guardian  
Phone: 555-555-5555

**Safe Interaction Program**

To The Officer Receiving This Card  
The person presented on the front of this card is a member of the Elizabeth Police Department's Safe Interaction Program. This program is designed to assist individuals with hearing or communication difficulties in interacting with police officers. If you have any questions about the program, please call us at (908) 588-2000.

East Division - Gladys Davis - Officer  
West Division - [Name] - Officer

**Safe Interaction Program**

**ELIZABETH POLICE**  
SAFE INTERACTION PROGRAM

Hi, My Name Is Eric Doe

I may have trouble communicating. Eye contact may be difficult for me. I'm easily overwhelmed by intense sensory input like sounds and bright lights. When I am scared or frustrated I may act aggressively.

If I am lost or in trouble, my emergency contact is on the back of this card. Please be patient with me. I am  VERBAL  NON-VERBAL



# ID CARDS ASSIST COMMUNICATION WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AND OTHER FIRST RESPONDERS

# ID and Contact and Emergency Cards



Many municipal police departments provide personalized ID cards for persons with autism or their caregivers to carry with them to assist communication with law enforcement and other first responders. Use of these cards provides an opportunity for the autism community to advocate for themselves and a way to let law enforcement and others know that someone may need extra time or assistance during an interaction. While there are a variety of autism ID cards available from private vendors, a law enforcement-issued ID card allows for a further connection with and support of the autism community.

Elizabeth Police Department has been issuing ID cards for many years and have now expanded the card issuance through the Safe Interaction Program (SIP). Little Egg Harbor Police Department has created a voluntary 911 Alert ID connecting law enforcement, individuals with autism and their families, and the school district for effective and thoughtful response in an emergency.





The Elizabeth Police Department initiated the mock pullover program in 2020 as part of our Safe Interaction Program. The Safe Interaction Program

was created in response to concerns from our community and families. The idea for the mock pullover program emerged from the specific needs of an individual with autism who was newly licensed to drive.

**This proactive approach ensures that a traffic stop is not a new or intimidating experience for people with autism**

This proactive approach ensures that a traffic stop is not a new or intimidating experience for people with autism and that they are better prepared to communicate and respond appropriately in real-life situations. We promote the program through our social media accounts, the city website, canvassing, flyers, and partnerships with several organizations that recognize us as a valuable resource.

| Chief Giacomo Sacca, Elizabeth Police Department



# Mock Pull-Overs



Monmouth County

Mock pullovers provide a simulated experience in which individuals, particularly those with autism, can interact with officers during a traffic stop scenario. The program is essential because it offers opportunities for autistic individuals to understand what may occur during a motor vehicle stop and the kind of directions that officers may give. As a result, these simulations help autistic individuals have safer interactions if pulled over. An example of a thoughtful and comprehensive approach to mock pullovers is Elizabeth Police Department's Safe Interaction Program (SIP).



**MOCK PULLOVERS HELP AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS HAVE SAFER INTERACTIONS**

I HAVE  
AUTISM



LIVINGSTON  
POLICE  
AUTISM  
AWARENESS  
N.J.

I MAY  
RESIST  
HELP





# Seatbelt Covers and Magnets/Decals on Car



Monmouth County

Autism seatbelt covers and car magnets/decals are simple, yet effective tools designed to inform law enforcement and all first responders of the presence of an autistic motor vehicle occupant. The car magnet or decal alerts police officers pre-face-to-face engagement that this motor vehicle stop may require a different approach. The seatbelt covers clearly instruct officers that an occupant may be non-verbal, may resist, and may not be able to comply with instructions. These tools have the potential for life-saving interactions in the event of a traditional motor vehicle stop, a motor vehicle accident, or an incapacitated driver scenario.

Municipal police departments such as Livingston and Gloucester Township have taken the lead in employing autism seatbelt covers and serve as a model for larger county- or statewide adoption. Many county and municipal law enforcement agencies make car decals freely available to autistic individuals and families in a variety of designs.



Our department is always seeking new ways to enhance safety for both our residents and officers. I was developing a new autism-friendly program based on ideas I received through my membership on the Law Enforcement Advisory Committee, when a friend, whose child has severe autism, shared a photo. Her son, who attends school in Massachusetts, was wearing a seatbelt cover provided by the local Sheriff's Department which was meant to alert first responders to an occupant with autism. Inspired by this, I ordered plain black seat belt covers online and then had them customized at a local embroidery shop with our autism awareness patch and messaging. The families who have received our seat belt covers are very thankful for this additional safety measure for their loved ones.

| Officer Joy Klapal, Livingston Police Department

Autism New Jersey LEAC Member

Our Autism Awareness seat belt covers are one of many programs we do here at Gloucester Township Police to help bring awareness to developmental disabilities, especially to help when interacting with Law Enforcement. We actively participate and encourage our residents to sign up for the Special Needs Registry which, when combined with things like the seatbelt covers and the vehicle stickers, are important ways we try to improve any interaction with a person with special needs. I am very proud of the proactive approach the Gloucester Township Police Department is taking while still always looking for new ways to improve.

| Lieutenant Paul. P. Fisher, Gloucester Township Police Department



**COMMUNITY EVENTS ARE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERYONE, INCLUDING THE AUTISM COMMUNITY, TO SAFELY PARTICIPATE AND ENGAGE WITH THEIR LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERS**

# Community Events



Monmouth County

Law enforcement-hosted community events, such as National Night Out and Breakfast or Coffee with a Cop, are practices that allow law enforcement to actively participate in community outreach. They provide a wonderful opportunity to engage with members of the autism community and to foster meaningful relationships with them.

In August 2024, the Union County Prosecutor's Office partnered with the Union County Sheriff's Office, Union County Police Department, Children's Specialized Hospital and the Union County Board of Commissioners to host a first-of-its kind "National Night Out for Everyone." The event was thoughtfully planned with sensory-supportive, accessible, and other accommodating activities to promote inclusivity and an opportunity for everyone, including the autism community, to safely participate and engage with their local law enforcement partners.



Union County's National Night Out for Everyone was a groundbreaking event that brought people of all abilities together, fostering understanding and building stronger bonds between the community and local law enforcement. I want to recognize and thank all of our partners and sponsors for creating an environment that was truly inclusive for all residents of Union County, where we didn't just celebrate our community; we celebrated the uniqueness of every individual.

| Union County Prosecutor William A. Daniel

Union County law enforcement officers have dedicated their time, training, and passion to initiatives focused on treating every community member with respect and dignity. National Night Out for Everyone provided a valuable platform for our officers to engage with the community and discuss the work they have been undertaking. It was a great opportunity for direct connection and meaningful conversations with the people we serve.

| UCPO Community Prosecution Division Director Gina Iosim



**LOCATIVE TECHNOLOGY HELPS REDUCE AND HOPEFULLY ELIMINATE ANY TRAGEDIES**  
”

# Locative Technology



Monmouth County

Wandering and elopement scenarios are significant challenges for the autistic community and law enforcement/search and rescue personnel. Upgrades to real-time locative devices with advanced GPS technology and voice-monitoring features help reduce and hopefully eliminate any tragedies that may result from such scenarios.

Bergen and Passaic County Sheriff's Offices are two law enforcement agencies that have embraced real-time tracking technology to reduce wanderings and elopements and efficiently respond when needed.

*For individuals in areas with poor cellular connectivity, Radio Frequency (RF) technology such as that by Project LifeSaver can be considered as an alternative or supplement to real-time technology used to locate individuals who may have eloped/wandered.*



Over the past three years, the Bergen County Sheriff's Office has proudly utilized

AngelSense's real-time locative devices to support individuals with autism who are at risk of wandering. This innovative technology has proven to be an asset in our ongoing efforts to enhance safety and provide peace of mind to families and caregivers in our community. In most cases, AngelSense devices have empowered caregivers to find their loved ones promptly and efficiently, enabling a faster recovery. We remain committed to supporting and expanding this initiative. By leveraging such advanced tools, we continue to advance our mission of safeguarding and assisting all residents of Bergen County. Our partnership with AngelSense exemplifies our dedication to integrating technology in ways that enhance safety and well-being. We look forward to continuing this successful collaboration and exploring further innovations to better serve our community.

Since its launch in 2019, the AngelSense program at the Passaic County Sheriff's Office has revolutionized our approach to tracking and safeguarding elderly and special needs individuals. With 85 participants currently benefiting from its advanced GPS technology, the technology in the AngelSense eliminates the need for monthly battery changes that our old program required and allows for real-time tracking, significantly reducing the demand for first responder assistance. This innovation not only increases peace of mind, but it also enhances efficiency and empowers families with the tools they need to keep their loved ones safe, being able to locate them quickly and effectively without the need for first responder assistance.

| Commander Kathy Burgos,  
Passaic County Sheriff's Office

| Bergen County Sheriff Anthony Cureton



# Effective Communication



Autistic individuals can have communication challenges including difficulty understanding body language, inability to effectively communicate vocally, and difficulty understanding and following directions. Practices such as giving clear and concise instructions, allowing for additional response time, and recognizing that people may communicate with visual aids or communication devices are all ways to potentially support autistic individuals' communication needs. In addition, ensuring that there is an effective relay of information about an individual's communication challenges with other first responders can be the difference between a successful and unsuccessful interaction.

Cumberland County is doing their part to support effective communication by providing their officers with communication cards that they can use with autistic individuals when they encounter law enforcement and there is a potential communication challenge. The cards contain English/Spanish text, a letterboard, and pictograms depicting conditions and needs common to emergencies.



Per the New Jersey Attorney General Directive, the Mental Health Working Group was tasked to develop a 'toolbox' of resources available for

law enforcement to use to support those in mental health crisis, and those with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities, cognitive impairments, and substance use disorders. These communication cards achieve this objective and complement other like-kind protocols, programs, and resources available to first responders in Cumberland County.

| Cumberland County Prosecutor Jennifer Webb-McRae



## STRATEGIES TO PROVIDE A MORE SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT:

- ✓ Ensuring a calm and structured environment
- ✓ Sensory accommodations
- ✓ Physical considerations for personal space
- ✓ Appropriate de-escalation techniques



In April 2024 during Autism Acceptance Month, our department decided we needed to be more action and less planning when it came to protecting and engaging our autism community members at NJIT and within the greater Newark area.

After multiple conversations with command staff in the months prior, we decided that our officers could better serve our community by having potential de-escalation tools available on patrol that can be used to calm and build trust, when needed, during police and autistic community member interactions. These tools came in the form of deploying autism-friendly sensory bags in patrol vehicles and marking these vehicles with a specific sticker to allow the public to know sensory kits were within the vehicle.

**We needed to be more *action* and less *planning* when it came to protecting and engaging our autism community members**

| Kevin Kesselman, Chief of Police, NJIT Police Department  
Autism New Jersey LEAC Member



# Supportive Environment



In addition to communication challenges, autistic individuals may have sensory and other behavioral challenges that can include hyper- or hypo-sensitivity to sounds, sights, etc.; difficulty with change; repetitive movements such as rocking, pacing, flicking fingers, or waving arms; and verbal and physical aggression to oneself and others during stressful situations.

While every person's needs are unique, strategies such as ensuring a calm and structured environment, sensory accommodations when responding to calls (e.g., reducing noise, minimizing bright lights), physical considerations for personal space, and appropriate de-escalation techniques can be ways to provide a more supportive environment for autistic individuals.

NJIT Police Department is one example of a law enforcement entity actively working to provide autistic individuals with a supportive environment through their autism-friendly sensory bags that are kept in patrol vehicles.





# Autism & Law Enforcement Community Connections



Autism New Jersey supports law enforcement in their outreach efforts to the autism community. Law enforcement can, among other strategies, provide “leave behind” cards with local officers’ and Autism New Jersey’s contact information. Similarly, we encourage autistic individuals, their families, and those professionals who support them to connect with law enforcement. A first step can be connection letters.

**FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT** | Police have an opportunity to engage with the autism community, share specific practice information, and establish relationships with their residents with autism.

**FOR AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS** | Autistic individuals can engage with local law enforcement to introduce themselves and learn about autism-friendly practices and law enforcement-sponsored programs that might be mutually beneficial.

**FOR FAMILIES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM** | Families of individuals with autism can engage with local law enforcement to introduce their loved one with autism and learn about autism-friendly practices and law enforcement-sponsored programs.

**FOR EDUCATORS** | Educators can connect with local law enforcement to relay accurate autism-friendly practice information to the individuals and families they serve.

**DOWNLOAD OUR CONNECTION LETTER TEMPLATES:**

CONNECTION LETTERS





Autism and The  
First Responder

Autism and The  
First Responder





# TRAINING

## Quality Indicators for Effective Law Enforcement Autism Training



### RATIONALE FOR TRAINING

Pursuing a proactive approach to effective autism training, coupled with the practice of patience and tolerance, will ensure the wellbeing of the autism community, the public, and law enforcement. Training is an important tool to guide law enforcement on how to respond to a given situation and ensure that appropriate de-escalation techniques are employed to ensure a safe and positive interaction. High quality training permits an officer to reduce potential liability and the unwarranted or unnecessary use of force.

### RECOMMENDED LENGTH

To incorporate all the essential and recommended elements below, a comprehensive training will often need to be several hours in length. However, we recognize this may not always be feasible and therefore we recommend focusing on the most essential elements to maximize whatever time is available for training.

### RECOMMENDED FORMAT

Generally speaking, in-person training will often resonate more deeply with trainees and provide a sufficient baseline of instruction to be supplemented with future in-service live or virtual trainings. Again, however, this may not always be feasible. When in-person trainings are not possible it is recommended that:

- Virtual trainings be held live (synchronous) **OR**
- Prerecorded trainings (asynchronous) embed components that encourage active responding and engagement **OR**
- Departments supplement prerecorded trainings with opportunities for active engagement and discussion

# RECOMMENDED COMPONENTS

When looking for a quality autism training, there are important considerations related to curriculum, instructional/learning practices, and evaluation. Recognizing that different departments will have different capacities to implement training, we have divided these components into essential and additional elements.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

### CURRICULUM

Overview of autism, behavioral characteristics, communication strategies, and co-occurring disorders

---

Overview of existing autism-friendly practices such as registries, Blue Envelope, autism car decals and magnets, and mock pullovers

---

Discussion about wandering, elopement, and locative devices

---

Strategies for effective in-the-moment interactions including recognition of potential signs of autism in the moment, reduction of extraneous sensory stimuli (lights and sirens), and accommodations for boundaries and personal space needs

---

Techniques for de-escalation including remaining calm and patient, speaking clearly and concisely, and allowing for additional response time

---

Use of force considerations

---

Overview of autism-specific laws and guidance documents (e.g., NJ S761- “Requires MVC to provide, upon request, notation on driver’s license or identification card of diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder or communication disorder”)

### INSTRUCTIONAL/LEARNING PRACTICES

Training delivered by an individual with significant knowledge of autism and law enforcement

---

Individuals without clinical and/or law enforcement backgrounds should obtain input and/or review from relevant professionals to ensure quality and accuracy of training

---

Discussion on both what to do and what NOT to do in given scenarios

---

Active participation from trainees to allow for a free exchange of ideas and brief practice scenarios

---

Follow up/refresher training on a periodic basis

### EVALUATION MEASURES

Feedback by attendees to allow for responsive and ever-improving trainings

---

## ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS

### CURRICULUM

Content reviewed by a reputable autism organization

Discussion of considerations for police dispatchers

### INSTRUCTIONAL/LEARNING PRACTICES

Training delivered by a law enforcement professional jointly with a trained/licensed clinician (often useful because the characteristics of autism are varied)

Involvement of an autistic individual and/or autism community engagement

Presentation of in-the-moment-scenarios and vignettes to be considered as a table-top exercise or in break-out groups

Opportunities for review and discussion of the potential responses in given scenarios with feedback/critique from trainer(s)

Role playing with “actors” to simulate in-the-moment scenarios, capitalizing on the effectiveness of incorporating role-playing vs. purely lecture-based training

Use of headset simulators to allow officers to experience situations from the autistic person’s perspective

### EVALUATION MEASURES

Methodology for gathering measurable outcomes to determine the training’s effectiveness on performance in real world settings





## Autism for Police Officers

Autism often accompanies individuals that understand the social cues that may cause them to appear suspicious or unusual. They may be able to recognize these behaviors and take appropriate action.

- They have little understanding of cause and effect and their consequences
- May have issues committed against them
- Used or abused in the past



## POTENTIAL FUNDING FOR TRAINING

While some in-service training opportunities are free of cost, if a municipal police department's or county law enforcement office's operational budget is insufficient to absorb the cost of private vendor training, alternative funding options are available. These include use of Law Enforcement Trust Account (LETA), Municipal Law Enforcement Trust Account (MLETA) and Special Law Enforcement Fund (SLEF) monies, generally comprised of monies forfeited due to criminal activity.

While there are several restrictions on the use of such monies, the training of law enforcement has almost always been deemed the legitimate and primary use of these funds. Law enforcement agencies can also pursue state, federal, or private grant funding offerings.

## FINDING A TRAINING

For information about in and out-of-state offerings, visit our referral database and search the term, "Training for Law Enforcement" or use the QR code below.

If you are unsuccessful with finding a trainer in our referral database, call our 800.4.AUTISM Helpline or email us at LE@autismnj.org.



**LEAC MEMBERS' FEEDBACK AND INPUT  
HELP SHAPE AND INFORM THE DIRECTION  
OF THE INITIATIVE**



# AUTISM NEW JERSEY'S LAW ENFORCEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Through our statewide networking efforts, Autism New Jersey has established a Law Enforcement Advisory Committee (LEAC). This critical committee consists of multiple state, county, and local law enforcement professionals with diverse backgrounds, ranks, geographic representation, and experience working with autistic individuals and their families. Their feedback and input help to shape and inform the direction of the initiative.

The Committee meets regularly to share real-life experiences, identify existing and innovative autism-friendly practices, discuss successes and barriers, and strategize on encouraging the expansion and adoption of these practices. Moreover, advisory committee members serve as subject-matter experts and have routinely assisted other law enforcement agencies in raising autism awareness and supporting practice implementation.



# MEET OUR Law Enforcement Advisory Committee Members

“I am honored to be able to represent the New Jersey State Police on the Autism New Jersey Law Enforcement Advisory Committee as we endeavor together to build a stronger partnership between law enforcement and the members of the autism community.

It is my belief that effective training and community outreach should serve as a catalyst for establishing a prolonged trust and safe future interactions between individuals with autism and police officers.”

| Major Tom Wiczerak, New Jersey State Police





**Major Thomas Wiczerak**  
New Jersey State Police



**Chief Timothy Barlow (ret.)**  
Tewksbury Township



**Chief Kevin Kesselman**  
NJIT



**Chief Emmanuel Miranda**  
Newark



**Chief of Detectives Mitchell McGuire**  
Essex County Prosecutor's Office



“As a father and husband who lives the life of a person with a son that has autism and being a chief of police it’s my responsibility to be part of the acceptance change in our society. It’s a blessing and honor to work with Autism New Jersey and many police officers from around the state to be part of the change.”

| Chief Kevin Kesselman,  
NJIT Police Department



**Chief Michael K. Polaski (ret.)**  
Robbinsville Township



**Chief Christopher Winter**  
Pine Hill



**Deputy Chief Camilo Mos**  
Newark





**Sheriff Amir Jones**  
Essex County Sheriff's Office



**Undersheriff Fitzgerald Figliuolo**  
Essex County Sheriff's Office



**Captain Jason Gerba**  
Edison



**Captain Michael Matunas**  
Spring Lake Heights Police



**Lieutenant Thomas Egan**  
Robbinsville Township



**Lieutenant Gregory Quintero**  
Somerset County Sheriff's Office



**Lieutenant David Schultz**  
Hamilton



**Sergeant Richard Acosta**  
Union County Prosecutor's Office



“Partnering with Autism New Jersey to foster and create positive interactions between the law enforcement and autistic community is of great importance to the Essex County Sheriff's Office. Working together we can strategize and better train our officers in communicating and interacting with the autistic community and their families. “

| Sheriff Amir Jones  
Essex County Sheriff's Office



**Detective Robert O'Hare**  
Hamilton



**Officer Eric Ciano**  
Elizabeth



**Officer Joy Klupal**  
Livingston



**Officer Michael Piperato**  
Edison



**Patrolman Jesse Babcock**  
Franklin Borough



**Corporal Brian M. Fennesy**  
Point Pleasant



LEAC members as of 2/18/2025



I commend the efforts of Autism New Jersey to produce and execute a Law Enforcement Initiative. Officers throughout the state have an increasing amount of encounters with autistic individuals. Meeting with other officers is a great way to fine-tune our methods and obtain ideas that will help bring all encounters to a safe conclusion.

Many parents of individuals with autism work tirelessly to provide a safe environment for their children. Nothing is more satisfying than being a comfort to families when a need arises.

| Captain Jason Gerba, Edison Police Department

## MOTOR VEHICLE



Charged with identifying and facilitating the adoption of practices which will make driving safer for drivers and passengers with autism, law enforcement, and the community-at-large.

## REGISTRIES



Charged with ensuring that law enforcement has specific information necessary to interact safely, effectively, and compassionately with individuals who may require special considerations during missing persons events, emergencies or routine encounters.



# LEAC Subcommittees

As an extension of our advisory committee, Autism New Jersey has created topical subcommittees designed to address areas of need related to registries, driving (motor vehicle), training, and home-based interactions.



## HOME-BASED INTERACTIONS



Charged with identifying practices designed to improve relationships between law enforcement and persons with autism and their families and the unique challenges of responding to group homes effectively and supportively.



## TRAINING



Charged with identifying existing training programs and encouraging the promotion of quality training programs for law enforcement that reflect the input of autistic individuals, law enforcement, and professionals who work with individuals with autism.



Other Motor Vehicle

Mock pullovers - an autistic advocate

Andrew Arboe

Autistic Self-Advocate and Speaker



# CONNECT WITH US

## Here's how to get involved

Are you a law enforcement agency, prosecutor's office, or work in a related professional role?

We welcome the opportunity to connect with you.  
Please email us at [LE@autismnj.org](mailto:LE@autismnj.org).

### SURVEY

Take our survey to share any existing or innovative autism-friendly practices your agency has implemented.



### SAFE NETWORK



Join our network and connect with other law enforcement agencies to share information on your practices.

### E-MAIL LIST

We invite you to contact us with any questions, if you would like to request our free services, or if you would like to be added to our email list to receive initiative news and events.





The Power of Connection

800.4.AUTISM | [www.autismnj.org](http://www.autismnj.org) | [LE@autismnj.org](mailto:LE@autismnj.org)