



January 21st, 2025

Chairwoman Ricciardi
Transportation Committee
Subject: Testimony to HB 140

Dear Honorable Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. For the record, my name is Louis Esposito, and I am the Executive Director of ABLE NH. ABLE NH is a disability justice organization and a nonpartisan, nonprofit entity that fights for the civil and human rights of children and adults with disabilities.

I am here today to provide testimony to discuss the benefits of the Blue Envelope Program. This program is an essential step toward improving safety, reducing misunderstandings, and promoting inclusion for individuals with disabilities within their communities.

The Need for the Blue Envelope Program

Interactions between law enforcement and individuals with autism spectrum disorders can often be challenging due to differences in communication styles, sensory sensitivities, and behavioral responses. Research indicates that people with ASD are at a heightened risk of negative outcomes during police interactions due to misunderstandings of their behaviors. For example:

1. **Communication Barriers:** Many individuals with ASD struggle with verbal communication, which can lead to delayed or atypical responses during high-stress situations such as traffic stops. Officers may misinterpret these behaviors as noncompliance or defiance, increasing the likelihood of escalation (Wallace et al., 2020).
2. **Behavioral Misinterpretation:** Common autistic behaviors, such as stimming or avoiding eye contact, are often misunderstood by law enforcement as signs of nervousness or aggression. One study found that 60% of caregivers of individuals with ASD feared police contact due to concerns about such misinterpretations (Wallace et al., 2020).
3. **Barriers to Inclusion:** These interactions can reinforce systemic barriers, preventing individuals with ASD from feeling safe and included in their communities. Negative experiences with law enforcement can discourage individuals from driving or engaging in community activities that foster independence and social connections (Grindle et al., 2024).

Evidence Supporting Structured Programs

The Blue Envelope Program addresses these challenges by providing a structured, straightforward way to communicate essential information. Research highlights the importance of tools and training to improve interactions between law enforcement and individuals with disabilities:

- **Precedent for Success:** Similar programs implemented in other states have shown promise in reducing misunderstandings during traffic stops. These initiatives provide officers with clear instructions on how to interact effectively with drivers who may have unique needs (Grindle et al., 2024).
- **Inclusion-Focused Outcomes:** Tools like the Blue Envelope empower individuals with disabilities to participate more fully in their communities by removing one of the key barriers to independent mobility and community engagement (Wallace et al., 2020).

Benefits of the Blue Envelope Program

The Blue Envelope Program offers several key benefits:

1. **Safety for Drivers and Officers:** By providing law enforcement with information on the driver's communication needs, the program reduces the likelihood of escalation and fosters a safer environment for all parties involved.
2. **Empowerment and Inclusion:** Individuals with ASD and their families gain confidence knowing they have a tool to facilitate smoother interactions with law enforcement. This confidence encourages greater participation in community life, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion.
3. **Proven Effectiveness:** Studies suggest that drivers with ASD experience a statistically significant reduction in anxiety and improved preparedness following exposure to tools like the Blue Envelope and simulated police interactions (Grindle et al., 2024).
4. **Cost-Effective Implementation:** With an estimated fiscal impact of less than \$10,000 annually, the program's benefits far outweigh its modest cost.

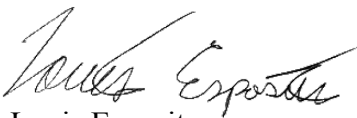
A Blue Envelope program underscores the importance of removing systemic barriers and fostering equity. Disability is not merely a medical issue but a social one, shaped by the environment and policies that either enable or inhibit inclusion. The Blue Envelope Program is a tool for dismantling these barriers, ensuring that individuals with ASD can navigate their communities with dignity and independence. By facilitating better interactions with law enforcement, this program affirms the rights of people with disabilities to live fully integrated lives.

Conclusion

The Blue Envelope Program represents a proactive solution to a significant issue. By fostering better communication, understanding, and inclusion, we can protect individuals with autism while ensuring law enforcement officers have the tools they need to perform their duties effectively. This program is a step toward building a community where all members, regardless of ability, can participate fully and safely.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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References

Grindle, H., Sassu, K. A., Dooley, J. M., Farmer, E. B., & Volkmar, F. R. (2024). Facilitating interaction with police during routine traffic stops for persons with ASD. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-024-06459-3>

Wallace, D., Herbert, J., Tyler, D., & McGee-Hassrick, E. (2020). Interactions between individuals on the autism spectrum and the police: The fears of parents, caregivers, and professionals. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 15(2), 950–964. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paaa059>