

Morris County Sheriff's Office

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Morris Law Enforcement Announce Inception of The "Blue Envelope Program" during Autism Awareness Month

The Morris County Sheriff's Office, Morris County Prosecutor's Office, and the Morris County Police Chiefs Association announce the start of the "Blue Envelope Program" this April 2023.

April is Autism Awareness Month and to bring attention to some of the concerns law enforcement officers face when encountering a driver with autism, the "Blue Envelope Program" is being initiated in Morris County. The program began in Connecticut with the intention of alleviating some unnecessary confusion which sometimes occurs between Police and Sheriff's Officers and the individual driver who has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The program works by providing a direct way for people affected by ASD, who sometimes have difficulty in communicating directly, to communicate effectively with Police and Sheriff's Officers they have ASD during motor vehicle stops by simply conveying their credentials to the officer in a blue envelope.

The intention is to disclose the driver's condition immediately and instantly improve interactions between the motorist and law enforcement. The program works by allowing the ASD driver to present a blue envelope containing the vehicle operator's driver's license, vehicle registration, and vehicle insurance card, along with contact information (cell phone) for family and friends to the officer if they are stopped for a motor vehicle infraction. Additionally, there are instructions to educate the police officer to the fact the driver with ASD may display behaviors that might otherwise lead to suspicion on the officer's part, such as lack of eye contact, or unusual reactions to flashing lights or loud sirens. There are also tips for the officer to be aware of possible uniquely displayed behaviors by the driver as well.

Morris County Prosecutor Robert Carroll, Sheriff James M. Gannon, and Mendham Township Police Chief Ross Johnson, President of the Morris County Police Chiefs Association, announce start of this program today.

Prosecutor Carroll remarked, "I think this is a needed and innovative way to help members of our community feel more comfortable with law enforcement. The Blue Envelope Program may help drivers and officers feel safer and communicate easier."

The program originated in Connecticut and is being emulated throughout the United States. It was suggested in Morris County by Washington Township Chief Jeff Almer.

Recently, Morris County Sheriff James Gannon had 3000 Blue Envelopes with accompanying enclosures printed and had them distributed for immediate use by each municipality this Autism Awareness Month.

Sheriff Gannon said of the program, "This is a great way to reduce any added danger by creating a communication bridge between drivers with ASD and our officers. Police stops can be tense absent any communication gaps and we don't want that to be further exacerbated simply because of a misunderstanding, everyone's safety is important to us here in Morris County".

Chief Ross Johnson also praised the program and Chief Almer of Washington Township for bringing it to light. Chief Johnson began as the President of the MCPCA in January and pushed to have this program up and running for this April – National Autism Awareness Month. Chief Johnson said, "It's a terrific way to bring immediate awareness to an officer on a stop before the situation has an opportunity to potentially escalate or to deescalate an interaction that may be turning into a negative encounter. The program fosters a positive meeting with our officers and the public we serve. Our Association's Executive Board meets with Prosecutor Carroll and Sheriff Gannon every month to exchange ideas and this idea is one we all agreed was worth pursuing immediately".

If you or a family member would like a "Blue Envelope" you can reach out to your local Police Department, the Sheriff's Office, or the Prosecutor's Office and one or more will be provided upon request.

Sample envelope text:

Front text:

POLICE OFFICER :

- Driver may exhibit signs of anxiety due to bright lights and noises like your radio
- Driver may display repetitive body movements or fidgeting and may have unusual eye contact
- Speak clearly and use the most simplistic explanations possible. limit unnecessary details
- Allow driver extra time to respond, driver may need more time to formulate a response
- Clearly tell the driver when the stop is over and they can leave
- If the driver becomes upset, consider contacting the person listed on the contact card

IMPORTANT VEHICLE PAPERS

- Driver's License
- Vehicle Registration
- Current Insurance Card
- Emergency Contact

Back text:

"BLUE ENVELOPE" IMPORTANT VEHICLE PAPERS!

- Keep your hands on the steering wheel until otherwise directed, even if the officer is not at your car.
- The officer may shine a flashlight in your car, may have a radio, and may have flashing lights on their car.
- When an officer gets to your car, let them know you have a blue envelope. answer the officer's questions, and ask the officer before moving any parts of your body.



POLICE OFFICER SPECTRUM AWARENESS GUIDE ON REVERSE SIDE OF ENVELOPE

BLUE ENVELOPE

Dear Family Member or Care Provider,

You know better than anyone, the struggles that are faced by those who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is sometimes difficult to communicate properly with those who have ASD. The “**Blue Envelope**” was created to help those with ASD, as well as Police Officers, in the event of a motor vehicle stop.

The primary goal is to aid these drivers with document organization and to educate them about what to do during a motor vehicle stop. Please review the **Blue Envelope** and the **Emergency Contact Form** with those under your care and create a plan customized to their needs. Your police department can help with the plan. The **Blue Envelope** also helps the Police Officer by identifying those with ASD and guides them on how to better interact with them. Police Officers currently receive training on how to recognize those with ASD, the **Blue Envelope will** buttress that training.

Please place color photocopies of the **driver’s license, vehicle registration card, and insurance card** in the **Blue Envelope**. The **Emergency Contact Form** is located on the reverse side of this form. Please list several emergency contacts to ensure that someone is reachable. Be sure to place a **Blue Envelope** in each vehicle that is operated by the person with ASD.

To help us to better interact with the person with ASD, please review these steps with them:

- Keep your hands on the steering wheel until otherwise directed, even if the officer is not at your car.
- Remember, the officer may shine a flashlight in your car, may have a radio, and may have flashing lights on their car.
- When the officer gets to your car, say: “I have a “**Blue Envelope**”
- Answer the officer’s questions and ask the officer before moving any parts of your body.
- When the officer tells you, slowly get the **Blue Envelope** that has your **driver’s license, registration and insurance card** and hand the **Blue Envelope** to the officer.
- The officer will go back to their car to check your information, and you will need to wait for the officer until he/she comes back.
- When the officer comes back to your car, they will explain why you were stopped and will tell you when to leave.

This program is brought to you by **your local Police Department, the Morris County Police Chiefs Association (MCPCA), the Morris County Sheriff’s Office, and the Morris County Prosecutor’s Office.**

Thank you,



Robert Carroll
County Prosecutor
Morris County

Chief of Police



James M. Gannon
Sheriff
Morris County



Ross Johnson
President
MCPCA

BLUE ENVELOPE

I have Autism:

I have been medically diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). My medical condition may impair my ability to communicate with others. As a result, I may have difficulty understanding your directions and I may not respond to your questions. I may also display physical signs of being uncomfortable if you touch me or move too close to me. Please do not interpret my behavior as refusal to cooperate. I am not intentionally defying your instructions.

If I exhibit behaviors which impede our interaction, I request that you contact the person(s) noted below on my behalf; he/she will confirm my diagnosis and provide information you may need about my identity or assistance in way to interact with me.

Print Name

Contact Name

Contact Number

Contact Name

Contact Number

Contact Name

Contact Number