



Testimony to the Public Safety and Security Committee

February 14, 2019

By Leslie Simoes, Executive Director

H.B. 5156 AN ACT CONCERNING FIRST RESPONDER TRAINING FOR INCIDENTS INVOLVING JUVENILES WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER AND NONVERBAL LEARNING DISORDER

Good morning Senator Bradley, Representative Verrengia and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee. My name is Leslie Simoes and I am the Executive Director of Autism Services and Resources Connecticut or ASRC. We are the state's oldest and largest advocacy organization for individuals on the autism spectrum and their families. We rose from grass roots advocacy 23 years ago and have hundreds of families and individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in our ASRC family.

ASRC supports H.B 5156 as it will require first responders to receive training on techniques for handling incidents involving juveniles with autism spectrum disorder and nonverbal learning disorders.

Recent research concluded that individuals with developmental disabilities are approximately seven times more likely to come in contact with law enforcement than others and law enforcement officers could receive training to prepare them to evaluate physical cues or body language that may indicate the person they come in contact with has autism.

What is Autism? Autism is a broad-spectrum neurological disorder, which presents itself in a variety of symptoms that affects individuals differently. Estimates of persons having some form of autism exceed 500,000 nationally, becoming the third most common developmental disability in the United States. Autism affects the normal development of the brain relating to social and communicative interaction. Individuals with autism have difficulty appropriately communicating with, or relating to, others.

Because autism affects every sector of society, first responders need to understand the disability and then to learn ways to interact with these individuals that will allow for the best possible outcome for all involved.

With training, first responders can learn to apply certain techniques in the initial contact or interview, which may increase the probability of appropriate responses and lead to a successful outcome of the encounter.

ASRC offers our experience and expertise and will work with policy makers to develop appropriate and timely trainings for first responders. There are a variety of first responder trainings both nationally and in Connecticut and we urge this committee to look at possible training modules that will make the first responders feel confident in their ability to successfully deescalate potentially negative interactions. Ultimately, everyone wants the best possible outcomes for all involved.

Links to national trainings and first responder trainings

<https://www.autismriskmanagement.com/>

We respectfully urge the members of this committee to support H.B. 5156 and we applaud State Representative Zawistowski for raising this important issue as H.B. 5156.

Feel free to contact me with questions and I thank you for your time and consideration.

Leslie M. Simoes

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