



SHERRI BEVAN WALSH

Summit County Prosecutor

Newsletter

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Message from the Prosecutor



Prosecutor
Sherrri Bevan Walsh

In honor of **April as Autism Awareness Month**, I am dedicating this month's newsletter to covering issues surrounding autism and law enforcement. As most of you know, I have a son with autism, so the issue is very important to me personally. I appreciate your taking a few minutes to read this special edition. I hope the information will be both educational and useful.

This month, Sheriff Drew Alexander and I launched a project that has been a goal of mine for a long time, the **Take Me Home** program. Take Me Home is a database created by an officer in Pensacola, Florida — who provides it free of charge to law enforcement — that contains photos and characteristics of individuals who may have trouble communicating with law enforcement. Should officers encounter an individual who is unable to communicate, a search can be executed based on characteristics to try and identify the individual. The Sheriff's Office and my Office will maintain a central Summit County database, and will provide it free of charge to participating jurisdictions.

While we are starting with children with autism, we will be expanding as quickly as possible to adults with autism, children with other disabilities, and seniors who have Alzheimer's or dementia. No one with a disability will be turned away who wants to be entered into the system. We are currently working with the Greater Akron Chapter of the Autism Society of America to put together a volunteer force to help us populate the database. We are also going to sponsor an in-service to train police officers from participating jurisdictions on how to use the system so that eligible individuals can go to their local police station to register for the **Take Me Home** program.



Thank you to the following individuals and police jurisdictions for participating in the **Take Me Home** program. Many of them were able to come to the kick-off press conference, held at a park in Fairlawn where a child with autism was lost (and found) last year.



Greater Akron Autism
Society of America
Bob Haren, Champion
Sheriff Drew Alexander and
his Office
Akron Police Department
Bath Township
Copley
Fairlawn Police
Fairlawn Mayor Bill Roth
Hudson
Macedonia
New Franklin
Northfield Village
City of Norton
Sagamore Hills
Springfield Township
Twinsburg

Did you know...

What is Autism? An Overview

Autism is a complex neurobiological disorder that typically lasts throughout a person's lifetime. It is part of a group of disorders known as **Autism Spectrum Disorders** (ASD). Autism occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups. Autism impairs a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. It is also associated with rigid routines and repetitive behaviors, such as obsessively arranging objects or following very specific routines. Symptoms can range from very mild to quite severe.

Autism Spectrum Disorders can usually be reliably diagnosed by age three, although new research is pushing back the age of diagnosis to as early as six months. Parents are usually the first to notice unusual behaviors in their child or their child's failure to reach appropriate developmental milestones.

Quick Facts...

- 1 in 150 children is diagnosed with autism
- 1 in 94 boys is on the autism spectrum
- 67 children are diagnosed per day
- A new case is diagnosed almost every 20 minutes
- More children will be diagnosed with autism this year than with AIDS, diabetes & cancer combined
- Autism is the fastest-growing serious developmental disability
- Autism costs the nation over \$90 billion per year, a figure expected to double in the next decade
- Autism receives less than 5% of the research funding of many less prevalent childhood diseases
- Boys are four times more likely than girls to have autism
- There is no cure

www.autismspeaks.org

Questions? E-mail Laurie Cramer:
cramer@prosecutor.summitoh.net

We're on the Web!

www.co.summit.oh.us/Prosecutor/Index.htm

Top Cops

Sheriff Drew Alexander
Sgt. Brian Westover



These two Top Cops embraced the **Take Me Home** program and helped launch it here in Summit County. A monumental undertaking by any measure, their dedication and leadership is bringing a community service to our area that is invaluable to parents and caregivers of individuals with disabilities.

Prosecutor Walsh said when nominating these two Top Cops, "Sheriff Alexander's leadership on this initiative shows once again his commitment to our community. It also shows his compassion on an issue dear to my heart, autism.

"Sgt. Westover, who works with my office on a number of community projects, is always a pleasure to work with and not only brings his time and ideas to the table, but also works on their implementation. This take-action cop is what we need in our community."

Thank you, Top Cops!



Outrageous Crimes

Children with disabilities are at an increased risk of being sexually abused because they may not understand what is happening and may be unable to communicate the crime.

A man in Cleveland molested several children with autism, claiming it was his right because it was a sacred ritual. He is awaiting trial on 74 charges of rape, drugs and pandering obscenity to minors.

Stay on the alert for predators, especially with children with special needs.

Tips for Interactions with Persons with Autism

Law enforcement officials might wonder how they can identify someone with autism. Unfortunately, individuals with autism do not display any specific "signs" that can help in identification. In addition, individuals with autism frequently exhibit characteristics that can be confused with behaviors often exhibited by suspects, such as aggression, lack of cooperation, silence, and/or yelling. It is vital to remain calm and, when possible, use visual cues along with verbal commands (such as holding your hand up while saying, "stop.").

Individuals with autism:

- May appear high/drunk/having psychotic episode
- May be non-verbal/have limited verbal skills
- May be unresponsive/react inappropriately
- May repeat your words/body language/ask "why" repeatedly
- May have difficulty expressing needs
- May throw tantrums/scream for no apparent reason
- May not make eye contact
- May not fear danger/not react to pain
- May be *extremely* sensitive to stimuli
- May self-stimulate (rocking, spinning, hand flapping)
- May not understand warnings/rights
- May become anxious in new situations
- May not understand consequences of their actions
- May injure themselves

In Criminal Justice Situations:

- May not understand rights or warnings
- May become anxious in new situations
- May not understand consequences of their actions
- If verbal, may produce false confession or misleading statement

What can you do?

- Above all else, remain calm
- Give the individual extra personal space
- Reduce stimuli such as lights/sirens/reflections of light
- Avoid touching/making threatening gestures
- Permit the individual to complete behavior pattern, when possible
- Speak in direct, short phrases
- With children, squat down so they can see you
- Speak slowly and in short sentences
- Give them a moment to respond (don't keep repeating question)
- Call the *Take Me Home* program

Seek the assistance of someone who is familiar with autism.