



# ***BCPO News***



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## **Burlington County Kicks Off “Blue Envelope” Program** *Will Assist Motorists with Autism Spectrum Disorder*

Burlington County Prosecutor LaChia L. Bradshaw and police officials from multiple jurisdictions unveiled a countywide program today designed to create a less stressful atmosphere for special needs motorists by improving communication between patrol officers and individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) during traffic stops.

Known as the Blue Envelope Program, the concept provides a mechanism for drivers to alert officers to the fact that they have special needs, so that behavior, mannerisms and unconventional responses to questions will not be misconstrued as disrespectful or threatening behavior.

The announcement, made during a brief ceremony at the Medford Township Police Department, is a fitting way to close out National Autism Acceptance Month, which is held each year in April.

“This is a very effective approach to eliminating misunderstandings because it provides officers with information that will better enable them to communicate with those who have special needs when they are pulled over,” Prosecutor Bradshaw said. “The result is that an already stressful situation is prevented from escalating, and instead becomes manageable for the drivers and the officers.”

BCPO Chief of Investigations Patrick J. Thornton said the program is designed to be simple, and has proven to be very beneficial to law enforcement agencies in other jurisdictions. It was piloted in Connecticut and Arizona, and first implemented in New Jersey in Hunterdon County.

“All that is required of the driver is to hand the blue envelope to the officer,” Chief Thornton said. “That will enable the officer to provide clear instructions, which in turn eliminates confusion and greatly reduces the stress and anxiety associated with the traffic stop.”

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The items that officers will access inside the blue envelope include the motorist's driver's license, vehicle registration, current insurance card and emergency contact information.

"This initiative is great tool to reduce the risk and confusion for the autistic community when operating a motor vehicle on our streets," said Medford Township Police Chief Arthur E. Waterman. "This gives both the driver and officer the ability to understand and communicate better, keeping everyone safe."

The program has been embraced by the Burlington County Police Chiefs Association, which invited officials from Autism New Jersey to a recent meeting to discuss its benefits.

"Traffic stops can be stressful for anyone, but for people with autism, or individuals with communications disorders, they can lead to misunderstandings," said Autism New Jersey's Director of Law Enforcement Initiative Doreen Yanik. "Programs like this can help officers and drivers alike to slow down, recognize that a driver might need some accommodations, and communicate their needs."

The Blue Envelope Program will be in effect throughout Burlington County. Residents can pick them up at their local police departments.

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