



# BROOME COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff Frederick J. Akshar II

Undersheriff Sammy L. Davis

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For Immediate Release:

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## BROOME COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE PRESS RELEASE

### *Sheriff Announces New "Blue Envelope Program" to Improve Interactions Between Police and Individuals and Families with Autism*

(TOWN OF DICKINSON, NY) "Please be patient, I might need some extra help."

A new program at the Broome County Sheriff's Office aims to create a safer, more understanding environment for interactions between law enforcement and individuals and families with autism.

Joined by Congressman Marc Molinaro, Broome County Legislator Matt Pasquale and local representatives from ACHIEVE, Advocates for Autism, Alive With Autism, GiGi's Playhouse, Helping Celebrate Abilities and the Southern Tier Independence Center, the Broome County Sheriff's Office announced the "Blue Envelope Program," a first-in-New-York-State initiative aimed at easing communication and preventing misunderstandings between individuals with autism and law enforcement during interactions like traffic stops or during an emergency.

Being pulled over by a police officer can make anyone anxious. For someone with Autism Spectrum Disorder, it can cause an even greater issue, between the heightened situation, the flashing lights, the sounds of radios, and other noises.

"We work every day to create a safer, more inclusive community for all our residents of Broome County," said Sheriff Fred Akshar. "No matter where you are in our community, you deserve to feel safe, and today's partnership is an important step toward helping drivers and passengers with autism have positive interactions with police on the road."

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(607) 778-2924

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(607) 778-2166

The Blue Envelope Program is based on similar programs in neighboring states and focuses on the following points:

- **Enhancing Awareness and Understanding:** The Blue Envelope provides officers with quick access to essential information about autism, fostering empathy and patience for more positive interactions.
- **Alleviating Stress and Reducing Anxiety:** Traffic stops can be overwhelming for individuals with autism. The Blue Envelope acts as a visual signal, helping officers modify their communication approach to ease the driver’s anxiety.
- **Facilitating Communication:** The envelope includes practical guidelines for officers, enabling effective communication with individuals with autism, even in high-pressure situations like traffic stops.
- **Promoting Preparedness:** The Blue Envelope serves as a resource for individuals with autism and their families, encouraging them to organize important documents and confidently present them during a stop, enhancing their sense of security.

### How it works:

Participating individuals with autism and their families are provided with a blue envelope, insert card and Blue Envelope Program vehicle sticker. Outside of the blue envelope contains instructions for the driver, like keeping hands on the wheel, the officer may shine their flashlight in the car and the police car may have flashing lights. The envelope also tells the officers what to do, like simplifying requests and if the driver becomes upset and whether the driver/passenger is verbal/nonverbal. Inside the envelope is a fillable insert card containing emergency contact information.

When someone with autism is pulled over, the sticker helps inform the officer that either the driver or the passenger has autism and might need additional assistance or understanding for a successful interaction. The driver can provide the officer with the blue envelope containing their driver’s license, vehicle registration, vehicle insurance, and an emergency contact card inside.

“The Broome County Sheriff’s Office is charged with the safety and security of our citizens of every ability,” said Sheriff Akshar. “Any tool that can help us better communicate and interact with the people we serve can help make all the difference, turning a potentially difficult situation into one of trust, understanding and above all safety. I’d like to recognize Deputy Ed Hlebica, one of our Community Engagement Officers, for initiating this program and making it the first of its kind in New York.”

Congressman Marc Molinaro said, "I started the Think DIFFERENTLY initiative in 2015 to encourage our community to rethink how we interact with people with disabilities. I'm grateful to Sheriff Fred Akshar for taking this step to make sure every interaction between law enforcement and a person with a disability is a safe one. The Broome County Sheriff's Office is setting a new standard for New York State, and I thank them for their ongoing efforts to strengthen the bond between the department and those they protect."

"STIC has been empowering people with disabilities since 1983. Helping the disabled population access and navigate their world in an equitable and safe manner is at the heart of our mission, and the Blue Envelope Program will be an integral part of that mission. We are so proud to be involved with this initiative that will potentially save lives and foster improved communication and relationships between our hardworking law enforcement officials and our civilian community members of all abilities."

## **How to participate**

The Broome County Sheriff's Office has provided hundreds of blue envelopes and stickers to local community organizations to help distribute them to individuals and families with autism they serve. Partnering organizations include ACHIEVE, Advocates for Autism, Alive With Autism, GiGi's Playhouse, Helping Celebrate Abilities and the Southern Tier Independence Center.

The Blue Envelope Program shares many similarities with the Yellow Dot Program, designed to help first responders provide life-saving medical attention immediately after a crash or other emergency. The yellow dot sticker on car windows helps alert first responders of vital medical information stored in the glove compartment.

For more information on either the Blue Envelope Program or the Yellow Dot Program or to request your envelope and sticker, please contact the Broome County Sheriff's Office Community Engagement Team at 607-778-1168 or email Deputy Ed Hlebica at [Edward.Hlebica@broomecountyny.gov](mailto:Edward.Hlebica@broomecountyny.gov).

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