



Texas Department of Public Safety

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PRESS RELEASE
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Initiatives to Help Texas Drivers with Communication Challenges

AUSTIN – The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), along with the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities and Aspergers101, today announced initiatives designed to assist Texans who have communication impairments. In an effort to facilitate effective communication, DPS first reminded Texans of the communication impediment option that drivers may select to be reflected on their driver licenses/ID cards. DPS also announced that it has recently coordinated with Aspergers101 to allow them to provide training and education to DPS officers about autism spectrum disorders, other disabilities and potential communications challenges associated with those disorders. In addition, the department announced that it is working with Aspergers101 to develop a *Driving With Autism* camp that will help increase driver confidence and practical skills.

“At DPS, our mission is to serve and protect the people of Texas,” said DPS Assistant Director for the Driver License Division Joe Peters. “This optional notice on the driver license and ID card puts important information in the hands of our law enforcement officers, which will help them better serve and protect individuals with a communication impediment.”

“Protecting and enhancing public safety for all Texans – on and off the road – is paramount for DPS,” said Major Jason Hester, DPS Education, Training and Research Division. “We are pleased to offer these new training initiatives, which will be powerful tools in enhancing understanding of law enforcement as well as help prepare and build confidence in potential drivers.”

Individuals diagnosed with certain medical conditions – such as autism spectrum disorders, Down syndrome, stuttering or hearing impairment – who experience challenges when communicating with others, may (but are not required to) request a communication impediment notice be placed on their driver license/ID card. Printed on the back of a driver license/ID card, the voluntary designation informs officers of a communication challenge – this awareness can help facilitate better communication during any encounter with the individual.

Working in conjunction with Aspergers101, DPS has expanded trooper recruit training to include segments that raise autism awareness among officers, and advise them on how best to approach and respond to an individual with autism during traffic stops and in other instances.

Once the program is developed and launched (later this year), the *Driving With Autism* camp will feature classroom instruction and hands-on driving practice for eligible drivers with a communication impediment. Camp attendees will also participate in role-play scenarios about what to expect during a traffic stop.

“Our committee is devoted to expanding opportunities for people with disabilities in all areas of life – one of those being transportation freedom,” said Ron Lucey, executive director of the Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities. “We commend DPS for these initiatives that will put that opportunity within reach for more individuals within the autism and disability communities.”

“These initiatives are truly groundbreaking. I have peace of mind knowing that I’m protected with the communication impediment driver license notice,” said Sam Allen, a Texas driver with autism and the son of Aspergers101 Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Jennifer Allen. “The ability for me to drive is a stepping stone toward a life of independence; and I am grateful that initiatives like the ones announced today are changing the way law enforcement interacts with those with autism or other communication challenges.”

“Much of my fear about my autistic son driving has been eased thanks to the Texas Department of Public Safety. I deeply appreciate that DPS responded to our efforts to raise awareness and seek meaningful policies that accommodate those with a communication challenge related to autism, Asperger’s syndrome, brain injury or other speech impediments,” said CEO Jennifer Allen. “These initiatives set the stage for powerful well-rounded programs that other states hopefully will emulate.”

Founded by Jennifer Allen, Aspergers101 is a non-profit organization that provides information regarding high-functioning autism and Asperger’s syndrome, and advocates for the autism community. Aspergers101 consists of a

team of professionals, doctors, therapists, educators and individuals with autism. For more information, visit www.aspergers101.com.

April is National Autism Awareness Month and represents an opportunity for communities, organizations and individuals to promote understanding, inclusion and acceptance.

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