

February 1, 2017

Representative Richard Proehl
Chairman, House Transportation Committee Room 582-N
Kansas Capitol
Topeka, KS

Re: In Support of the Intent of HB 2016; Joey's Law

Chairman Proehl and members of the House Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 2016. The recent tragedy involving Joey Weber was the result of serious miscommunication and misinterpretation of the actions of an individual with autism. I am the parent of a teenager with autism and fully support legislative initiatives intended to improve understanding of autism among first responders.

I believe that the solution to this problem is multifaceted:

1. improved **awareness of autism among first responders**
2. improved understanding among individuals with autism **how to interact with first responders**
3. provide **a means to rapidly identify to first responders that an individual has autism**
4. provide adequate **experiential training for first responders** in how to interact with individuals with ASD

The current version of the bill draft only attempts to address #3 above i.e., a means to rapidly identify to first responders that an individual has autism. While laudable, I have two concerns about the bill language. First, the eligibility criterion, "needs assistance with cognition," does not accurately identify many individuals with autism who are capable of obtaining a driver's license. Rather than "cognition," their challenges are largely related to deficits in social communication, challenging behaviors, misinterpreting non-verbal cues, etc., that could cause misunderstanding with law enforcement. I would ask that the committee consider amending the criterion to read, "such person has been medically diagnosed as having a disease or disability that may impair such person's social communication or behavior, including, but not limited to autism spectrum disorder."

Second, is the question as to whether police officers will know to look for this information on the drivers license or registration? Also, other first responders such as firemen and EMTs may have no reason to ask for a drivers license. I would ask that the committee consider legislation similar to Alabama Act 2014-344 as a means to identify to first responders that an individual has autism. From the Alabama Public Health webpage:

"Alabamians who have a diagnosis that falls within the autism disorder spectrum may apply for an identification card that can assist in their interactions with first responders and law enforcement officers during potentially stressful situations. Wording on the card explains that the individual falls within the autism spectrum and may have difficulty communicating or understanding directions. The card further states that the person may become agitated if touched because of his or her medical condition."

Regarding point #1 above; improved awareness of autism among first responders

Many local autism support groups offer autism sensitivity training for first responders. I am not sure that this training can be mandated for first responders but perhaps the legislature could provide funding to regional autism support groups across the state to provide a state-approved training curriculum.

Regarding point #2 above; improved understanding among individuals with autism how to interact with first responders

I think this is an aspect of the problem that may be frequently overlooked. We train our kids the rules of the road but may not stress to them how to behave if they were to be pulled over by police. Perhaps testing over this situation could be included as part of the eligibility requirements to get a driver's license and/or the autism ID card mentioned above.

Regarding point #4 above; provide adequate experiential training for first responders in how to interact with individuals with ASD

It is one thing to read about autism and behaviors that autistic individuals may display but it is an entirely different thing to feel comfortable appropriately reacting to challenging behaviors during a stressful situation. Some sort of experiential training for first responders would also be of great value. Again, I am not sure how to include this in legislation other than to perhaps provide funding for regional autism support groups to provide a state-approved training program.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

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cc: Representative Patty Markley