

Teresa Day

2417 N. Lindberg

Wichita, KS 67226

316-636-9682

teresaday2@att.net

Testimony Re: Joey's Law, SB 74

Wednesday, February 15, 2017

Good morning. My name is Teresa Day and I am the proud parent of two teenage sons with autism, Grant and Logan. I appreciate this opportunity to speak in favor of Joey's Law. By the end of this morning's meeting, I am hopeful that the majority of you—perhaps even all of you--will agree that this law is just good public policy.

My oldest son, Grant, who is 17, posted the following on Facebook last year: "I'm not sure how I'd act if I was confronted by law enforcement. I'm afraid that I might panic, which could lead to disaster." While those are chilling words for a mother to read, they do point to one undeniable fact; Grant is not only intelligent, but is also self-aware. And, I think that is a salient point in this discussion.

We are not requesting special accommodations due to intellectual deficits. These are drivers who have passed state requirements to receive a license. As such, they are at least as capable as anyone else who has a Kansas license. So, let's make sure we understand who we are dealing with and why this is such an important issue, not just for the drivers but also for our very dedicated members of law enforcement.

Many people with high-functioning autism lead relatively normal lives; they go to school, have jobs, even get married and have their own families. As a parent, it's my job to get Grant and Logan ready to do just that. Also as a parent, it's my job to keep them safe.

When persons with autism, even those who function well on a day-to-day basis, are exposed to certain triggers, their nervous system becomes overwhelmed and they can behave inappropriately. As parents, my husband and I have seen this happen many times. We are constantly working with our children to anticipate as many of these situations as possible to develop strategies and to put aids in place. Joey's Law is a perfect example.

When anyone sits in a car, they encounter a tremendous amount of environmental stimuli. For most of us, this isn't particularly challenging. For persons with autism, however, it is much different. Every time my sons, Grant and Logan, get into a car, they are bombarded with audio and visual cues coming at them from all angles. Because of how their brains work, they must sort through this stimuli to determine what should be placed in the background in deference to the other. Not everyone develops the skill to do this; it takes time and it takes concentration.

Obviously, those who successfully obtain a driver's license have mastered the ability to deal with external stimuli and have proven themselves capable on the road. That said, being stopped by an officer is completely unexpected and can be very traumatic. When a person with autism looks in their rearview mirror to see a police car with lights flashing their nervous system is already loaded up, as just discussed. Observing the police car would cause their nervous

system to suddenly become flooded with new, unexpected, and confusing stimuli. This is when the person may panic and begin to act inappropriately. It is easy to understand how this behavior could develop. It is also easy to see how an officer could misinterpret what is happening.

Joey's Law is a great solution. The officer would know that they are not dealing with someone who is oppositional; they merely have someone who requires patience. This law would provide peace of mind not only for families of persons with disabilities but also for the law enforcement community.

I'm going to end my comments today the same way I started—with a Facebook post from my son, Grant. I think that he expresses more eloquently than I ever could the reason that Joey's Law is important.

"I'm very concerned that my autism will lead me to make a poor decision when I'm around the police...I don't want to be harmed, for example, during a routine traffic stop."