

Dear members of the CT Police Transparency and Accountability task force:

My name is Shannon Leary Knall. I am the mother of three boys, the oldest of which is on the autism spectrum. Since Jack was diagnosed at the age of just over 2.5, back in 2003, I have been working with Autism Speaks to bring awareness and acceptance to autism. I currently serve as a CT Autism Ambassador.

I'd like to start by reading to you, an excerpt from a February 202 NY Times article entitled, "When the Police Stop a Teenager with Special Needs."

"According to a 2017 study from the A.J. Drexel [Autism Institute](#) at Drexel University, an estimated [one in five teenagers with autism was stopped and questioned by the police before age 21](#), and 5 percent were arrested. And according to [research at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia](#), people with disabilities, including those on the autism spectrum, are five times more likely to be incarcerated than people in the general population, and "civilian injuries and fatalities during police interactions are disproportionately common among this population."

You have certainly read of these interactions in the news as of late.

My son is 6'2 and loves theater. He is independent enough to go for recreational walks by himself and loves to do so. As a 19 year old, he wants to be independent. As he walks he is often singing, sometimes leaping and dancing, and to the unknowing person may look like something other than a theater loving, joyful young man. My fear is the reaction of the unknowing person, and for that reason we have met with our local police department, with whom I have a very solid relationship. Over the years, I have worked with them to help bring Project Lifesaver (an elopement tracking device) to our community, and have brought in speakers to discuss autism in the community and how it might present itself in an emergency.

I am fortunate to live in a place where my police department is a willing partner in seeking to serve those with autism. There are two aspects of this statement that are worth pointing out; first, I am white and my son is white and with that skin color comes with unspoken privilege, and second, if I as a parent had not pursued these initiatives...would they exist?

To that end, my recommendations are as follows:

1. Autism is spectrum, and presents itself differently in every person who is impacted. While there may be some commonalities such as lack of eye contact, it

is important that police know and recognize the ENTIRE spectrum. Police departments need funding to gain this awareness.

2. Just as we have school resource officers, it would be beneficial to have police representatives in the public developing relationships with families like mine, creating opportunities for discussion and education.
3. Dedicated training opportunities shared between first responders so that should a crisis present itself, those first to the scene are working with the same information to de-escalate.

I thank you for your time and am happy to speak with you further.