



June 5, 2024

The Hon. Mike DeWine
Governor, State of Ohio
77 S. High Street
Riffe Center, 30th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215-7117

Dear Gov. DeWine:

It is with great sadness that we write to add our voices to advocates calling for immediate change to Ohio's mental health system to ensure the safety of people – including individuals with Autism and other developmental disabilities – experiencing a mental health crisis.

*The Autism Society of Ohio (ASO) is a coalition of the Ohio affiliates of the Autism Society of America and includes: the **Autism Societies of Central Ohio, Greater Akron, Greater Cleveland, Dayton, Mahoning Valley, and Northwest Ohio**. Together, we cover 100% of the state and thousands of individuals and families living with Autism and other developmental disabilities in our communities.*

According to a USA Today investigation (June 3, 2024, Cincinnati Enquirer, Columbus Dispatch and USA TODAY Network), Isaiah Trammell, a 19-year-old diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, died tragically while in custody in the Montgomery County jail. As we read the article and the deputies' actions, it was apparent they had no training or understanding of Autism. **From restraining Isaiah, to how they spoke to him, to not responding to Isaiah's calls for help and medication and his self-stimming in the form of head-banging, this tragedy was a demonstration of ignorance.** Isaiah's coping strategies became his death sentence, and it was 100% preventable.

From the moment the neighbor called the police on Isaiah, the catastrophic events revealed all too common preconceived biases of community members and law enforcement who misunderstand Autistic behaviors as suspicious or dangerous. In addition, had a non-law enforcement crises team responded to the 911 call, Isaiah may still be alive today. These teams are co-responders trained to de-escalate mental health situations and provide resources on the spot for people who are not a danger to themselves or others.

According to the medical journal *The Lancet*, co-occurring psychiatric conditions are more prevalent in the Autism population than in the general population. Careful assessment of mental health is an essential component of care for all people on the Autism Spectrum. Some studies suggest as many as 95% of individuals with Autism will also have co-occurring conditions that include ADHD, anxiety disorders, sleep disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar, and schizophrenia.

Gov. DeWine

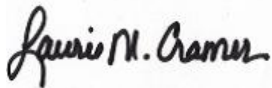
Page Two

The *USA Today Network* article stated, "None of this happened by accident. Decades ago, Ohio lawmakers closed state-run psychiatric hospitals but failed to keep a promise to replace them with a robust community-based mental health system."

We urge you and our state legislature to address the state's broken mental health system, including mandating training in Autism Spectrum Disorder for law enforcement to keep everyone safe in a mental health crisis. We also urge the backing of non-law enforcement teams to respond to mental health situations with support and appropriate treatment, along with psychiatric locations that are funded and equipped to prevent more families from burying their loved ones.

If you have any questions or need help from our members, including training, please do not hesitate to contact me at (330) 940-1441 x3 or Laurie@autismakron.org.

Sincerely,



Laurie Cramer
Executive Director
Autism Society of Greater Akron
ASO Member
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Background: Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. According to the CDC, 1:36 children and over 5.4 million adults live with Autism. Developmental disabilities are a group of conditions that begin during the child's developmental period and typically occur before a child is born. There is often nothing about how people with ASD look that sets them apart from other people, but people with ASD may **communicate, interact, behave, and learn** in ways that are different from most other people. The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged.

- 44% of individuals with Autism have an average to above average IQ.
- 38% of individuals diagnosed with Autism have a mild to severe intellectual disability.
- 25-30% of individuals with Autism are nonverbal and may not have a means to communicate.

