

## Written Sponsor Testimony HB No. 115

My name is Natalie Page and I am a speech-language pathologist (aka speech therapist). As such, I have a passion for working with and advocating for individuals with communication difficulties. My brother, Chris Page, was arrested for an OVI charge despite being sober, due to various complications in the communication exchange between him and law enforcement personnel. This happened as a result of his communication difficulties from his diagnosis of autism. His charges were eventually dropped, but took over 3 months to get urinalysis results back to prove his innocence. Chris was booked, had to have family post bond, and went through all of the steps of an arrest, despite his innocence.

I state my support for HB No. 115, 132<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly sponsored by Representatives Gavarone and Wiggam. Cosponsors: Representatives Ryan, Greenspan, Kick, Goodman, Hambley, Thompson, Arndt, Lipps, Patton, Stein, and Riedel, to enact section 3304.23 and 5502.08.

As a speech-language pathologist, I would like to express the skills involved in an entire communication exchange. Communication is much more than your verbally spoken word. It encompasses your nonverbal behavior, such as eye contact, tone of voice, hand gestures, body orientation, proximity, and facial expressions, or lack there of. It involves the way you understand and interpret language, as well as your comprehension of language input. It includes the way you problem solve and handle various situations in a variety of settings.

If any aspects of the communication exchange are misinterpreted, it will result in a communication breakdown between two or more individuals. This causes confusion amongst both communication partners and could have a direct impact on the interaction between a driver or non-driver with a communication disability, such as autism, and law enforcement personnel. Drivers with autism or another communication disability are very high functioning and very capable of driving. These communication deficits do not undermine their ability to be a safe driver.

My brother, Chris, drove 10 years without a single ticket (individuals with autism tend to be excessive rule followers). In March 2016, when he was pulled over for a speed violation, Chris was very compliant and agreed with the speed violation charge. However, following a multitude of "clues" seen by the officer, he was asked to complete a field sobriety test.

He failed. Miserably. Despite not being under the influence.

Why did he fail? Communication breakdowns occurred before, during, and after the field sobriety test. He had difficulty following verbally presented multi-step directions while in a situation that monumentally heightened his nerves. He expressed affirmation of the directions, despite obvious misunderstanding. He exhibited poor balance and motor control, which are common symptoms of autism.

My opinion is that we could have potentially passed more aspects of the test if he had been in a less nerve-racking situation, however, he still would have not been able to follow many of the commands and process the verbally presented multi-step directions. Again, this does not make him an unsafe driver.

Throughout this entire situation, the police did nothing wrong. They did what they are trained to do. Having the option to place a communication disability diagnosis in the police LEADS database could prevent many future wrongful arrests. Autism is increasingly more common, as are other communication disabilities. More capable individuals with these diagnoses will continue to obtain their drivers license. As such, this problem could only get worse without implementation of some type of aid for these individuals. If this bill passes, this would be a great step to preventing future wrongful arrests due to communication difficulties.

I think this bill, along with a training currently being developed for the police on autism, and a training for student drivers with autism on how to interact with the police, would be an efficient combination to resolve many of these situations. In addition, I would love to see the implementation of an autism or communication disability identification card, possibly one that could be state-sealed approved, to provide a type of relief to individuals on and off the road who have communication difficulties. The card could list their signs and symptoms, along with emergency contact information and how to best aid the individual in a stressful situation. These aspects would be an incredible advancement for our community and individuals with disabilities.

At this time, I would like to restate my support for HB No. 115. I see nothing but positive advancements as a result of this voluntary option that would help both sides of a communication exchange between law enforcement and individuals diagnosed with a communication disability.

Best regards,

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