



Testimony for Hearing on H.B. 115
Community and Family Advancement Committee
March 29, 2017

Shawn A. Henry
Executive Director, OCALI

Good Afternoon Chairman and members of the Community and Family Advancement Committee,

I am Shawn Henry, Executive Director of OCALI -- the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence. Established by the legislature in 2005, OCALI's mission is to serve individuals with autism and low incidence disabilities and provide them with opportunities for a high quality of life throughout their lifespan. OCALI's efforts focus on building the capacity, knowledge, and skills of families, educators, and other professionals through leadership, professional development, technical assistance, technology, and resource dissemination. Through ongoing collaboration with local, state, and national partners, OCALI's world-class tools, publications, and services have made a significant impact in all 88 Ohio counties, all 50 states, and over 200 countries. In 2016, OCALI received a grant by the Ohio Department of Education for two newly-designed centers that work to increase access and equity for students, families and communities by connecting resources with need. The centers have two distinct yet synergistic missions. The Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness works to increase access and equity for students, families, and communities through connections, resources, and supports. The Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials Center is a centralized, responsive resource center that empowers individuals with disabilities by providing accessible educational materials, access to assistive technologies and highly specialized technical assistance and professional development.

An estimated 1 in 68 Americans is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) annually, representing a 78% increase over the last decade [Centers for Disease Control (CDC) 2012]. The majority have an IQ in the average to above average range. The characteristics of ASD are complex and include reduced eye-contact during social interactions, repetition of activities, a decreased ability to process and understand others' emotions based on facial expressions, difficulty with motor coordination and planning, atypical gaze processing, and the inability to communicate verbally or nonverbally.

ASD is a lifelong disorder with characteristics that are easily misunderstood by community members, including those in the judiciary systems, such as police officers.

Let me be clear, individuals with ASD who have the proper training and abilities CAN drive. Driving affords independence, employment, participation in the community and enhances a person's ability to lead a life that is self-directed. As we encourage and support greater polices for self-direction we must also educate the community about the characteristics of ASD and how to properly interact with an individual on the spectrum.

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OCALI strongly believes in the merits of House Bill 115. The example of Mrs. Page's son is not unique. There are multiple cases where individuals with ASD have been pulled over by law enforcement and due to the communication skills of the individuals or the lack of awareness by law enforcement, an individual has been arrested. This bill changes that dynamic in Ohio. Providing information to the police officer prior to approaching the car that the driver has a communication disability and will afford positive interaction and a deeper tool kit for the officer to use.

This tool being proposed would have served my father extremely well. He was a Columbus police officer with 41 years of service to the community, also serving as Court Liaison Officer. As he learned about my work, he would inquire about autism trying to gain a better understanding. He was a caring, gregarious person and true public servant with good intentions in every interaction, but without our conversations, he may not have been aware of a communication disability before making contact with a driver. This tool increases the likelihood of a more informed, positive interaction.

As the registry is built, OCALI is prepared to assist with law enforcement training and education. OCALI received funding from the State of Ohio to create an innovative video-based learning solution in autism strategies that provides practical information, instruction and real life examples of evidence-based practices. OCALI's Autism Certification Center: *ASD Strategies in Action* is FREE TO ALL OHIOANS and is an online resource that can be accessed anywhere, anytime. This program gives users (even in the most rural areas of our state) tools to ensure they are equipped to effectively support individuals on the autism spectrum. After just one year, *ASD Strategies in Action* has provided training for over 10,000 users and is making a difference in the lives of thousands of individuals and families in Ohio and across the country. This tool can be used by the public safety community to teach and educate law enforcement about ASD and how to interact with an individual on the spectrum.

Chairmen Ginter and committee members, thank you again for allowing me to testify. I am happy to answer any questions, as well as provide you with more information about OCALI's resources.

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