

# Section 2 - Autism Overview

**“Decisions made in our courtrooms directly affect someone’s future, and we owe it to them and to ourselves to make sure that we understand how to best help them.”**

**- Kevin M. Dougherty, Justice  
Pennsylvania Supreme Court**

The most recent prevalence data available (2014) identified over 55,000 individuals that received autism services in Pennsylvania. Research done by the Center for Disease Control (2014) estimated that as many as 130,000 individuals in Pennsylvania were not receiving services. This statistic likely means that the possibility of an individual entering a courtroom diagnosed or undiagnosed is significant. A good grasp of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can support a judicial response and interaction that results in a helpful, positive outcome.

This section provides four primary resources consisting of information that can be utilized to aid judges in making effective decisions concerning those individuals with ASD.

- I. This seven-part resource details information and overviews regarding ASD. It includes frequently asked questions for judges. (See, *The ASERT Collaborative Justice Project, 2019*)
- II. What information is needed in making decisions concerning children and youth diagnosed with ASD? What federal cases and family law cases are there to assist? Is there a checklist to assist courts in gathering information? (See, *Dicker, Sheryl, and Marion, Robert, 2012*)
- III. This four-page resource summarizes characteristics of autism, considerations for legal professionals, and how to prepare for court hearings with individuals with autism. (See, *Gammicchia, Carolyn and Johnson, Catriona, n.d.*)
- IV. Is there any information about the experiences of individuals with Autism in Pennsylvania? This resource includes videos of one statewide and five regional virtual listening forums, organized by Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. The forums are an effort to more thoroughly understand the experiences of individuals with ASD and the justice system in Pennsylvania. (See, *Regional Autism Roundtable, 2020*)

