

House Bill No. 2016

Senate Bill No. 74

Joey Weber Act

By Rep. Finney, Ballard, Curtis, Henderson, Lusk, Lusker, Miller, Neighbor, Pittman, Sawyer, Trimmer, Victors, Whipple, Wilson, and Winn.

Testimony respectfully submitted by: Jeanie Zortman, Chair, Governor's Commission on Autism

Thank you, Chairman Proehl and members of the House Transportation Committee for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill No. 2016 and Senate Bill No. 74, the Joey Weber Act.

On behalf of the Commission on Autism, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to appear and provide testimony. Today, I appear as the Chair of the Governor's Commission on Autism, but also as a parent of an adult child with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

As parents, we all strive for our children to grow up and become independent adults. As parents of exceptional children; individuals with autism spectrum disorder; we do too. Our children, during their lifetime experience a spectrum of challenges and struggles with communication; sensory issues; cognitive challenges; social skills, anxiety and stressors of being in a neuro-typical world. With early intervention, education and therapeutic services our children can and do successfully transition to into living independently, higher learning, and employment opportunities.

The Joey Weber Act serves both in the best interest of Law Enforcement and individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other Neuro-developmental Disorders and their families. For law enforcement and first responders, it serves as an intervention response tool. The ability to identify and respond effectively to the individual. For the families, a sense of knowing their loved one is safe and will be understood. In the event of an accident law enforcement and first responders will receive communication from dispatchers that a person with exceptionalities may not respond in appropriate manner

Throughout the state of Kansas, parent and law enforcement driven collaboration and advocacy is already at work. In western Kansas, the Josiah Foundation hosted a training in Hays, Kansas featuring Dennis Debbaudt, a leading global voice on autism training for law enforcement and emergency responders. John Ketron, Clark County Sheriff and Autism Commission parent member presented.

In Dodge City, Compass Behavioral Health and the Ford County Sheriff's Department have collaborated in providing training for deputies and local police officers. In the next year, we plan to expand and serve all the 16th Judicial District and become a model for the rest of the state to follow.

Lastly, the mother in me would like to speak to you as another parent and share just a few words about a few young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, I have truly had the pleasure to know.

Colt, is an Eagle Scout with a 4.0 grade average. Colt, will graduate the University of Kansas this year and will complete his graduate degree in Occupational Therapy.

David, worked at the local convenience store and built fence for a rancher in his community to buy his first car. David attends Hutchinson Community College.

My new friend Braedyn is seven and for the first time sat on Santa's lap this Christmas. His parents are his voice

Mikeala, graduates from high school this year. Mikeala will never drive and will live and work in Dodge City, but her parents know that the passage of the Joey Weber Law will be an instrument of awareness and acceptance that will serve all Kansans as we travel the great state of Kansas.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

AUTISM FACTS:

- About 1 percent of the world population has autism spectrum disorder. (CDC, 2014)
- Prevalence in the United States is estimated at 1 in 68 births. (CDC, 2014)
- More than 3.5 million Americans live with an autism spectrum disorder. (Buescher et al., 2014)
- Prevalence of autism in U.S. children increased by 119.4 percent from 2000 (1 in 150) to 2010 (1 in 68). (CDC, 2014) Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability. (CDC, 2008)
- Prevalence has increased by 6-15 percent each year from 2002 to 2010. (Based on biennial numbers from the CDC)

