

Proclaiming the Month of April as Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 36 children ([CDC, 2020](#)) is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In California, the statistic is even narrower at 1 in 22 children ([CDC, 2020](#)). Chances are, many of us may know and love someone with ASD and other special needs. This motion to designate April as Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month aligns with the White House’s proclamation and the United Nations’ declaration of World Autism Awareness Day on April 2 as well as numerous global efforts and initiatives to raise ASD awareness, education, and inclusion.

Individuals with ASD are each unique and have a range of challenges, including social and communication (e.g., nonverbal or limited verbal) skills. For some individuals with ASD, lights and sirens can become overwhelming and sensory overload. Nearly half of those with autism may also wander or bolt from safety. Seeing a fully suited first responder or stranger can provide a sense of uneasiness. To help familiarize and expose individuals with ASD to first responders and mutually learn from one another on how to

MOTION

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best approach someone with special needs, the County of Los Angeles (County) Fire Department created the award-winning and nationally recognized *Sirens of Silence* program which launched in April 2021.

Promoting “Care Needs No Words,” the *Sirens of Silence* program consists of three components: 1) **education and awareness** for the Department’s fire and lifeguard personnel through a training module as well as access to a resource library of visual aids and informational materials (available online to anyone at no cost and in a variety of languages) with advice and practical tips on how to best approach, respond, and communicate; 2) **special needs-friendly events** for residents to meet and interact with first responders in a welcoming and sensory-sensitive space; and 3) **safety-related items** (i.e., seatbelt covers, sensory toys, identification cards, window stickers/signs, etc.) for special needs patients available at fire stations, lifeguard towers, and on apparatus.

As the [*Sirens of Silence*](#) program celebrates its three-year anniversary, the Department continually updates and increases its resources and materials based upon community input; develops and cultivates partnerships with County departments, other first responder agencies, local theme parks, venues, and community organizations to provide safe, welcoming, and sensory-sensitive spaces as well as promote awareness, education, and inclusion of individuals with autism and other special needs; offers the program for adoption and implementation to outside agencies; provides the training as a continuing education (CE) course; and, always spreads the *Sirens of Silence*’s message of kindness, caring, and inclusion through a permanent art installation upon a Torrance Beach lifeguard tower.

Embracing all abilities and proud to be a supporter of autism and special needs

awareness and acceptance, the Fire Department is dedicated to enhancing and continuing its gold standard of delivering and providing meaningful and professional care and service to everyone.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors proclaim the month of April as “Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month” throughout the County of Los Angeles and, in doing so, urge all residents, city officials, as well as community groups, clubs and organizations to join this effort in promoting awareness and inclusion throughout all communities.

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JH:kc