

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR JANICE HAHN

AGN. NO.
April 1, 2025

Proclaiming the Month of April as Autism Acceptance Month

Many of us know and love someone with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other special needs. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in 36 children (CDC, 2020) is diagnosed with Autism.¹ ASD is classified as a neurological and developmental disorder that affects social interaction, communication, sensory processing, and behavior. Designating April as Autism Acceptance Month aligns with the United Nations’ annual declaration of World Autism Awareness Day on April 2, 2025, as well as numerous global efforts and initiatives to raise autism and neurodiverse awareness, education, acceptance, and inclusion.

The Autism spectrum reflects a wide range of strengths and challenges, including difficulties with social skills and communication which may include being nonverbal or having limited verbal abilities. Sensory sensitivities, such as an aversion to bright lights or loud sirens, can be overwhelming and lead to sensory overload. Additionally, nearly half of individuals with Autism may wander or bolt from safety, creating potentially dangerous situations for themselves and their families. To address this, L.A. Found was launched in 2018 to help locate individuals with Autism and other cognitive impairments

¹ [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html)

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who go missing. The program relies on interagency coordination to ensure a swift response in the critical moments following a wandering event. Through the provision of location-tracking devices, law enforcement and first responders can quickly identify and safely reunite individuals with their families or connect them to emergency medical services.

Additionally, the Los Angeles County Fire Department (Department) launched its award-winning and nationally recognized Sirens of Silence program in April 2021, designed to help ease anxiety and fear when individuals with Autism encounter a fully suited first responder or an unfamiliar community helper's face. By bridging this gap and increasing awareness, the Sirens of Silence program fosters positive interactions between individuals with Autism and first responders while providing essential training to emergency personnel on how to best engage with individuals with developmental disabilities. Since its inception, Sirens of Silence has provided free resources and materials to the community to promote understanding and inclusion.

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 with someone with Autism; 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., sensory toys, identification cards, window stickers/signs, etc.) for special needs individuals available at fire stations, lifeguard towers, and on apparatus.

As the Sirens of Silence program celebrates its four-year anniversary, the

Department continually updates and increases its resources and materials based upon community input. It 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, acceptance, and inclusion of individuals with Autism and other special needs. The Department offers the program for adoption and implementation to outside agencies and provides the training as a continuing education (CE) course. Finally, the Department spreads the Sirens of Silence’s message of kindness, care, and inclusion through its permanent art installation on a Torrance Beach lifeguard tower and its annual “A Special Day with First Responders” event, hosted in partnership with the San Gabriel/Pomona Regional Center; this year’s event will take place on April 12th in the City of Pomona.

Los Angeles County embraces all abilities and is proud to support Autism and special needs acceptance. Additionally, all of our County Departments are dedicated to enhancing and continuing the gold standard of service delivery by providing meaningful and professional care to everyone.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

Proclaim the month of April as “Autism Acceptance Month” throughout Los Angeles County and World Autism Day on April 2, 2025, to urge all residents, city officials, as well as community groups, clubs, and organizations to join this effort in promoting awareness, acceptance, and inclusion throughout all communities.

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