

Legislation Text

File #: 210301, **Version:** 0

Recognizing April 2021 as Autism Acceptance and Awareness Month in the City of Philadelphia, and commending the Eagles Autism Foundation and Divine Providence Village for their vaccination initiative.

WHEREAS, April is National Autism Acceptance and Awareness Month, a time to educate our community about autism, also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (“ASD”), a complex neurological condition that affects, in varying degrees, language and social skill development, characterized by challenges in communication and social interactions, repetitive behaviors and movement, impacting individuals of all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, The 2014 Pennsylvania Census Report identified over 4,167 individuals in Philadelphia County with autism receiving services - more than double the previously documented number - the majority of whom are between the ages of 5 and 17 years old, with the number of adults over 21 years old increasing as the population ages; and

WHEREAS, According to estimates from the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (“ADDM”) Network of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”), 1 in 54 children have been identified with ASD, yet another indicator that this intellectual disability is, if not increasingly frequent, more likely to be diagnosed; and

WHEREAS, A cross-sectional study led by Drs. Jonathan Gleason and Wendy Ross of Jefferson Health this year of 64,858,460 patients across 547 health care organizations reveals that having an intellectual disability was the strongest independent risk factor for presenting with a COVID-19 diagnosis and the strongest independent risk factor other than age for COVID-19 mortality, indicating that screening for COVID-19, care coordination, and vaccination efforts should be intense within this population that is less able to consistently use masks and socially distance; and

WHEREAS, Neither the CDC nor Pennsylvania have included autism on their list of conditions for vaccination prioritization, and while Philadelphia, which maintains its own list for distributing doses, recently added people with intellectual disabilities - a group that includes some people with autism - to its priority list, their caregivers were not; and

WHEREAS, Families were already worrying that children with autism might not be able to wait in long lines at walk-up clinics, or may have challenging behaviors while getting vaccinated, or that their children have been outside so infrequently during the pandemic that their behavior in public was hard to predict; and

WHEREAS, To address these compounding challenges, the Eagles Autism Foundation and Divine Providence Village, Catholic Social Services’ residential intermediate care facility in Delaware County for people with intellectual disabilities, partnered to create a sensory-friendly by-appointment clinic by repurposing luxury boxes as “quiet spaces” with fidget toys, weighted blankets, and light projections on the ceiling, all intended to create a calming atmosphere where families could spend time there if a child became overwhelmed and nurses might enter to administer vaccines privately; and

WHEREAS, The organizers tried to help caregivers prepare for the experience by providing a visual schedule of the day's events, a step-by-step series of photos showing the lobby, the escalator, to share with their children to help alleviate anxiety; and

WHEREAS, More than 40 staff provided about one thousand first doses of the Moderna-developed vaccine at the all-day session, which will be followed later this month by another offering those same people second doses; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 has exposed the pre-existing inequities and inequality in our society, yet has also been met with wonderful acts of compassion, empathy, and service; and

WHEREAS, Divine Providence Village and the Eagles Autism Foundation have been an example of those virtues, providing necessary relief to families who have dealt with so much, especially in the last year, and who have been most exposed during the pandemic; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Does recognize April 2021 as Autism Acceptance and Awareness Month in the City of Philadelphia, and commend the Eagles Autism Foundation and Divine Providence Village for their vaccination initiative.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be forwarded to Divine Providence Village, as evidence of the sincere sentiment of this legislative body.