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MONTGOMERY COUNTY LAUNCHING "BLUE ENVELOPE" PROGRAM TO ASSIST SPECIAL NEEDS DRIVERS, POLICE DURING INTERACTIONS

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (June 8, 2023) — Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele and Whitpain Township Police Chief Kenneth Lawson, the current president of the Montgomery County Police Chiefs Association, announce the launching of a "Blue Envelope Program" to assist special needs drivers and police officers during interactions.

The purpose of the Blue Envelope Program is to help vehicle drivers who have conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), communications challenges, dementia, anxiety or other conditions that might impair their ability to communicate easily during a traffic stop, car accident or other on-the-road interactions with police officers. The program also raises awareness among police regarding this population of drivers and the kind of driver reactions they may observe during a traffic stop.

When the officer approaches the vehicle during a traffic stop, the driver is instructed to inform the police officer that they have a Blue Envelope and then hand the officer the envelope. Inside the blue envelope, the driver is instructed to place a copy of their driver's license, automobile registration and proof of auto insurance along with a form that includes information about the driver's special needs and a contact person, if necessary, to assist with the interaction.

"Traffic stops are a high-stress situation for most drivers. The driver sees the police lights come on behind them and they get worried about what they did wrong or if they might get a ticket. And that stress might even be magnified in some population of drivers," said Steele. "This program paves the way for as smooth an interaction as possible between police and those individuals who might not respond in ways that are expected."

Chief Lawson echoed that sentiment. "Our police officers are here to protect and serve every single person in our jurisdictions, and this program ensures that police are aware of the Blue Envelope driver's condition and the driver is aware of what to expect and what to do during a traffic stop. The program will help both parties."

The Blue Envelope Program, which has been implemented in other parts of the country for autistic drivers, was suggested to Upper Gwynedd Police Chief Dave Duffy by Ben Hartranft, a 25-year-old resident of Montgomery Township with ASD. The Police Chiefs Association enthusiastically supported the idea and added other

types of driver conditions beyond ASD to make it more inclusive. “Montgomery County is being a leader in awareness for those with autism and others,” said Hartranft. “I am really excited that the Blue Envelope program will bring awareness to action so those who work in law enforcement can understand more about people with autism and other conditions.”

The exterior of the Blue Envelope indicates whether the driver is verbal or non-verbal and instructs the driver to inform a police officer that they have a Blue Envelope when the officer approaches the vehicle.

Instructions for the driver include:

- Keep your hands on the steering wheel unless otherwise directed;
- The officer may shine a flashlight in your car;
- When asked for your vehicle/driver documents, hand the officer this envelope.

Information printed on the envelope for police officers includes:

- Driver may show signs of anxiety due to bright lights and noises;
- Driver may have difficulty communicating and may not maintain eye contact;
- Clearly tell the driver when the stop is over and that they can leave.

The special Blue Envelopes are available for free to all residents at police departments across Montgomery County.

Approved for release:
Kevin R. Steele