



Sheriff Steve Stovall

Stephenson County Sheriff's Office

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STEPHENSON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE LAUNCHES BLUE ENVELOPE PROGRAM

The Stephenson County Sheriff's Office, in partnership with The Autism Hero Project, is proud to announce the launch of the Blue Envelope Program, a new initiative designed to improve communication and promote safer, more positive interactions between law enforcement and individuals with autism and other communication differences.

The Blue Envelope Program provides individuals with a recognizable blue envelope that can be kept in a vehicle and used to store important documents such as a driver's license, vehicle registration, insurance card, and emergency contact information. The envelope also provides easy-to-reference guidance for both the individual and law enforcement officers during a traffic stop or other interaction.



For a person with autism or other communication differences, an encounter with law enforcement—particularly a traffic stop—can be stressful or overwhelming. An individual may have difficulty communicating, need additional time to process questions or instructions, avoid eye contact, exhibit repetitive movements, or be particularly sensitive to flashing lights, sirens, radios, and other environmental stimuli.

The Blue Envelope serves as an immediate visual cue to a deputy that the person may communicate, process information, or respond differently. This allows the deputy to adjust their communication when appropriate, provide additional time for the individual to respond, and help reduce unnecessary anxiety or misunderstandings while maintaining the safety of everyone involved.

“Our deputies interact with people from all walks of life, and good communication is one of the most important tools we have,” Sheriff Steve Stovall said. “The Blue Envelope Program gives our deputies valuable information at the very beginning of an encounter and gives individuals with autism and their families another tool to help communicate their needs. Something as simple as a blue envelope can help prevent a misunderstanding, reduce anxiety, and make an interaction safer and more positive for everyone involved.”

Participation in the Blue Envelope Program is free and completely voluntary. There is no registration process, and participants are not required to provide personal information to the Sheriff's Office to receive or participate in the program.

In addition to the Blue Envelope, the Sheriff's Office is making 6" × 3" Autism Awareness vehicle stickers available to participants. The stickers can be placed on a vehicle to provide law enforcement and

other first responders with an additional visual indication that an occupant of the vehicle may have autism and may benefit from additional time, patience, or a modified approach to communication during an encounter.

Beginning Thursday, October 1, 2026, Blue Envelopes and Autism Awareness vehicle stickers will be available free of charge at the following Stephenson County Sheriff's Office locations:

- Public Safety Building — 204 W. Exchange Street, Freeport
- Sheriff's Office Administrative Offices — Stephenson County Courthouse, 15 N. Galena Avenue, 3rd Floor, Freeport

Individuals participating in the program are encouraged to keep their Blue Envelope in their vehicle with their important motor vehicle documents. If stopped by law enforcement, the individual can present or identify the Blue Envelope to the officer. Instructions printed on the envelope provide information for the individual about what to expect during the encounter while also providing the officer with guidance regarding communication and behaviors they may encounter.

The Stephenson County Sheriff's Office is launching the program in partnership with The Autism Hero Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preparing individuals with autism for the world while also helping communities better understand and support individuals with autism. The organization provides autism education, first-responder training, community programs, advocacy, and other resources.

“The Blue Envelope Program is more than just a tool; it's a bridge of understanding. It empowers individuals and equips our first responders with the knowledge they need to approach every situation with patience and empathy, thereby ensuring a safer community for everyone,” said Tamika Lecheé Morales, Founder and President of The Autism Hero Project.

The Blue Envelope Program will become a statewide initiative in Illinois beginning January 1, 2027. By launching the program locally now, the Stephenson County Sheriff's Office hopes to increase awareness of the resource and make it immediately available to individuals and families in our community who may benefit from it.

The Sheriff's Office encourages individuals with autism and other communication differences, as well as parents, caregivers, and family members, to learn about the program and consider whether a Blue Envelope or Autism Awareness vehicle sticker may be beneficial to them.

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