

KEEPING THE FOCUS ON FACTS IN AUTISM POLICYMAKING

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My autism diagnosis doesn't always make my job as a state legislator easier, but it does motivate my efforts to ensure that our policymaking on behalf of neurodiverse Pennsylvanians is based on science and truth, not fear or speculation.

As chair of the Pennsylvania Autism Caucus and the first member with a diagnosis to hold that title, I am working hard to spearhead those efforts. Focusing on the facts and dispelling the stigma has never been more important, as disinformation from the federal government has been eroding confidence in the credibility of science, casting doubt on reputable medical studies, and stoking fear and confusion.

In September 2025, President Donald Trump and Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. held a press conference at which they asserted a link between Tylenol/acetaminophen use during pregnancy and autism. Soon after, multiple medical experts and professional associations, including the American Association of Pediatrics, issued public statements refuting those claims. Unfortunately, the damage resulting from high-level efforts to legitimize them had already been done.

Setting the Record Straight

In an effort to ensure that our own state policymaking remains focused on reliable scientific information, I called on state legislative leaders to schedule a hearing with scientific and medical experts to examine current research into the potential causes of autism. The House Majority Policy Committee responded swiftly and convened a hearing at the state Capitol in Harrisburg.

Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding, chief epidemiologist and chair of the Department of Public Health at New England Complex Systems Institute, testified that acetaminophen can be used safely during pregnancy and that the failure to treat a fever in expecting mothers can result in birth defects and miscarriage.

He also highlighted the gold standard for research published in JAMA on pregnancy, autism, and acetaminophen. The study – which included 2.5 million people in Sweden – did not find a link between acetaminophen use by expecting mothers and autism.

Dr. Reuben Brock, a professor of psychology at Pennsylvania Western University California who is autistic, addressed the claim that there are more autistic people than previously diagnosed. “There is not an explosion of autistic people happening right now,” Brock said. “There is an explosion of understanding.”

A livestream of the entire hearing can be found at [this page](#).

In further efforts to dispel misconceptions about autism, I recently spoke with Larry Kaspar at Pennsylvania Cable Network. We discussed the impact of disinformation at the federal level and the dangers of harmful rhetoric. I also shared some of my personal experiences. A recording of the interview is available [here](#).

State Services for People With Autism

In an effort to ease communications between police and people with autism during potentially stressful situations, the Pennsylvania State Police have developed a resource known as the [Autism Spectrum Disorder interaction card](#), which can be downloaded for free and carried in a wallet or saved on a phone. A video explaining more about the card and how it can be used is available at [this page](#). Our office can also help people download and print the card.

Information about other state resources for people with autism is available at [this page](#).

Please remember that our office is available to assist with a wide variety of state-related services. I encourage residents to contact us to see how we can help.

State Rep. Abigail Salisbury represents Pennsylvania's 34th Legislative District.

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