

29 September 2023

Section 9(2)(a)

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Our ref: OIA 107198

Tēnā koe Section 9(2)(a)

Official Information Act request: District court training - Autism

Thank you for your email of 1 September 2023 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), information regarding the training provided to court staff on dealing with people with Autism. Specifically, you requested:

1. *Can you please send information about what formal training people working at Hawera Court have had on dealing with people with Autism.*
2. *Specifically, what training in the past 2 years have people in the Hawera court had specifically on dealing with people with autism*
3. *I would like to also understand what support people in the Hawera court offer people with autism.*
4. *I would also like to understand what support in the past two years have been provided to people with Autism by the Hāwea court*
5. *Please also provide the same for what training is provided to the courts for dealing with people with autism.*

In response to parts 1, 2 and 5 of your request, I can advise there has been no specific training for staff on engaging with people with Autism. The Ministry does, however, have a disability awareness e-learning module that is available to all staff.

In response to parts 3 and 4 of your request about the support available for people with Autism, there is a communication assistance service that is available nationwide in courts to help participants with communication difficulties to participate in criminal or civil proceedings where the Evidence Act 2006 applies. A judge can direct communication assistance to help defendants understand court proceedings, and defendants and witnesses give evidence to the best of their ability.

Anyone who is working with or supporting a defendant or witness during their case can help to identify that they may need communication assistance. Many people who use communication assistance have (or are suspected to have) an intellectual or learning disability, autism or other neurodiversity, brain injury, or under-developed language or communication skills.

If a judge decides that communication assistance should be used, a communication assistant (who is a language and communication specialist) will assess the participant's

communication abilities. The communication assistant will write a report that tells the court how it can help the participant communicate during the court proceedings. The communication assistant may also:

- work with the lawyers to prepare questions for court that they will be able to understand and answer
- prepare easy to read documents or visual aids to assist their understanding
- check that they can understand what is happening in court and tell the judge if they need a break or other help.

Communication assistance is funded by the Ministry of Justice and there is no cost to participants or their whānau. Further information is available on the Ministry's website: www.justice.govt.nz/courts/going-to-court/pre/interpreters-language-and-disability-access/

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry website at: justice.govt.nz/about/official-information-act-requests/oia-responses/.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Act. The Office of the Ombudsman may be contacted by email to info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by phone on 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



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