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For immediate release

Addressing the Misuse of Autism as a Legal Defense in Criminal Trials

[Toronto, Ontario] Autism Ontario is deeply troubled by the recent developments in two ongoing criminal trials in Ontario, where the defense has cited autism as a mitigating factor in the alleged crimes. Both legal teams are attempting to establish a potential defense strategy of 'Not Criminally Responsible Due to Autism.' This approach follows the precedent set by Justice Molloy in the 2018 Toronto van attack trial.

Autism should not be used as a legal defense to evade responsibility for criminal actions. Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition primarily characterized by social impairments and differences in the ability to understand the emotions and perspectives of others. Autism is not synonymous with violence or a lack of moral compass, and it should not be equated with mental health issues. Regrettably, we often witness the oversimplification of autistic individuals, which results in unwarranted stereotyping.

Individuals on the autism spectrum, as well as those with other conditions, are more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators. The notion that autism leads to criminal behavior is a fallacy. All too frequently, an individual's actions are exclusively viewed through the lens of their autism diagnosis, neglecting the broader context of other contributing factors. This approach is dehumanizing and unjust.

As a society, we must refrain from associating autism with acts of violence. Instead, we must focus on addressing the various pervasive and harmful ideologies deeply embedded in our societal fabric.

For more information or inquiries, email the Autism Ontario media team at media@autismontario.com.

RESOURCES

1. Crane, Laura, Marasm Katie, Mulcahy, [Is Autism Linked to Criminality, 2015, Autism](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1362361315583411)

ABOUT AUTISM ONTARIO

[Autism Ontario](#) is the province's leading source of information and referral on autism whose mandate is to build a supportive and inclusive Ontario for autism. It provides autistic individuals and families across their life course with community-based access to meaningful supports, social learning opportunities, information, and connections. The organization's commitment to significantly and positively impacting the autism community is driven by its vision: Best life, better world, making autism matter!