

News Release  
For Immediate Release  
November 3, 2020

**National Autism Association Awarded DoJ Grant for Its 'Big Red Safety Box' Program.**



Portsmouth, RI – The National Autism Association announced today that it has been awarded a \$130,000 Department of Justice (DoJ) grant under the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) for its Big Red

Safety Box program. The program provides free safety boxes to U.S. families within the autism community in an effort to prevent wandering/elopement behaviors.

Wandering or “bolting” incidents have led to massive searches and countless tragedies across the country. In October, three wandering-related drowning deaths occurred in the autism community, including a four-year-old boy in Ohio, and five-year-old boy in Florida.

A Pediatrics study in 2012 found that 49% of children with autism attempt to wander/elope from a safe environment. A 2017 study conducted by the National Autism Association found that nearly a third of reported missing person cases over a six-year timeframe ended in death or required some level of medical attention. The group also found that roughly 70% of wandering-related deaths are caused by accidental drowning.

To help combat wandering-related tragedies, NAA developed the Big Red Safety Box Program in 2011. The boxes ship free-of-charge to families in need of wandering-prevention tools. “Our program provides the critical support families need to protect their children with autism,” says NAA Executive Director Krystal Higgins. “With this grant support from DoJ, we will be able to help thousands of additional families in the U.S.”

Each box contains door alarms, a personalized wearable ID, safety decals, emotional regulation tools, visual prompts, emergency forms, social stories, a safety checklist and more. Each child or adult diagnosed with autism in the U.S. qualifies to receive a Big Red Safety Box. Caregivers can apply at <https://nationalautismassociation.org/big-red-safety-boxes-now-available/>

Because search cases often lead to encounters with police, the group has also developed its Meet the Police initiative, which provides guidance on how to introduce children and adults with autism to members of local law enforcement.

#### About National Autism Association (NAA):

The National Autism Association is a nonprofit organization focused on addressing urgent issues in the autism community, including wandering/elopement, suicidality, bullying, restraint/seclusion, abuse, mistreatment, and discrimination. To combat autism-related wandering deaths, the group has provided over 55,000 Big Red Safety Boxes and Big Red Safety Teacher Toolkits to families and teachers across the U.S., as well as ongoing training for first responders and services professionals.

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