



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Douglas County First Responders Join Forces to Better Serve People with a Wide Variety of Special Circumstances

Lawrence, Kansas - A simple "Blue Envelope" may be the answer to help first responders better serve people in Douglas County who may require a more tailored experience during an emergency – in everything from routine traffic stops to more critical incidents.

Not everyone responds the same in dealing with emergent and often stressful circumstances. A variety of medical and mental health conditions can also cause people to act in ways that concern first responders and increase tension.

The new Blue Envelope program, introduced by an LKPD School Resource Officer, is now available throughout the county including the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, KU Police Department, Eudora Police Department, Baldwin City Police Department, Lawrence Kansas Police Department, Lawrence-Douglas County Fire Medical, and Mental Health Response Team.

The envelope holds all the important documents needed during an interaction, such as your license, insurance, and registration, in one place.

More importantly, it explains medical conditions for both the community member and the officer. The envelope gives officers notice that the person might need a little more time, might avoid eye contact, act in ways that appear strange, or could be overwhelmed by lights and noise. Participants also receive an awareness decal, to be placed at the front door of a home or on a vehicle, featuring a well-known symbol that represents developmental disabilities.

LKPD School Resource Officer Bailey Salsbury learned about the program and worked to coordinate the effort county-wide. "That kind of information can make a big difference in how the situation is handled. It helps turn what could be a tense or confusing interaction into something calm and controlled. We can talk with people as individuals, with their specific needs in mind, once concerns are eliminated," says Salsbury.

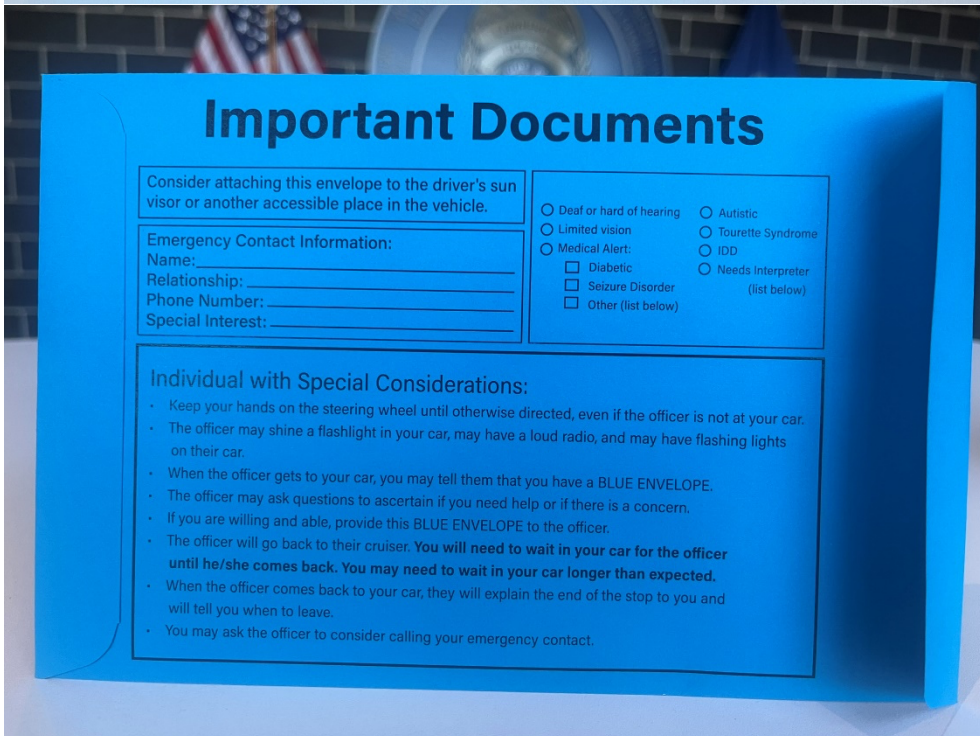
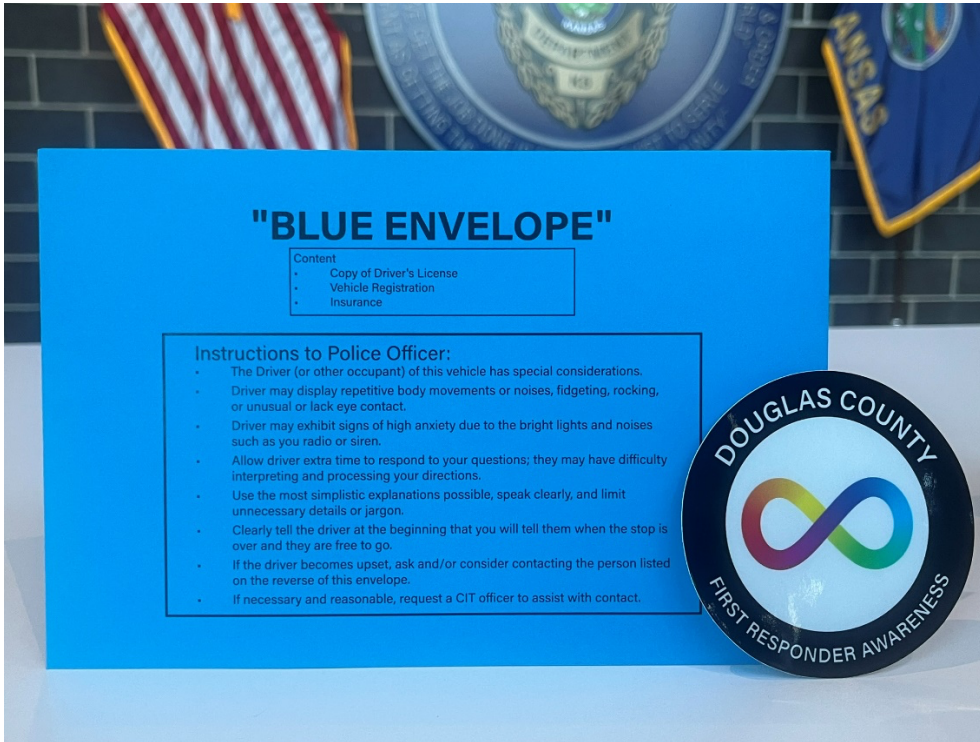
"This program is about understanding and communication," Douglas County Undersheriff Stacy Simmons said. "A small visual cue like a Blue Envelope decal can make a big difference in how first responders approach a situation, helping us better serve individuals who may process information or respond differently."

People will also feel more prepared. Instead of trying to explain everything in the moment, they can just hand the envelope to the first person who arrives – or to an officer on a traffic stop -- and let the information do the talking. The program has been shown to avoid miscommunication, lower anxiety, and make it easier to stay calm and follow directions.

"Officers are also less likely to misunderstand certain behaviors as suspicious or uncooperative, which helps prevent situations from escalating for unnecessary reasons. In the long run, tools like this can make traffic stops safer for everyone and build trust," says Salsbury.

Anyone who feels a Blue Envelope may help can pick up one up at any of the participating agencies. Salsbury adds, "The program is voluntary. No one is required to carry a "Blue Envelope. It's just a way for us to communicate more effectively with those we serve."

See included photos of the "Blue Envelope" front and back and the vehicle decal, which are also attached as separate files.



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