



Reduced Mobility Rights
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Mom starts petition to make flying safer for people with Autism

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Beth Joy's petition to amend the ACAA and make flying safer for people with Autism is boosted by the removal of a 15-year-old from a United flight.

Dr. Donna Beegle was flying back to Portland after a family vacation to Disney World. During the flight, her daughter Juliette became agitated because she was hungry.

Juliette eventually calmed down after cabin crew gave her a warm meal, but things were about to turn a totally unexpected twist.

"The next thing we hear is we're doing an emergency landing in Salt Lake City," Beegle told NBC station KGW of Portland, Oregon. "We have a passenger on board with a behavior issue."

Juliette and her family were escorted off the plane by police officers. This event reaffirmed the need for airports and airlines to study ways to best assist people with Autism and their families.

"Airlines are not required to honor special seating requests for autistic passengers", Beth Joy says in her petition. "I think this is wrong. Many autistic passengers require special seating while flying that should be respected."

Last April, during a family trip to Hawaii, Beth and her daughter Vivie had a mixed experience. "Flying, for someone with sensory and auditory processing disorders, can be quite difficult. Her neurologist recommended she sit in the bulkhead and by the window. The seat placement would help ease her symptoms and allow for easier care during the flight. We got a doctor's note requesting the appropriate seating arrangements



and called 6 months ahead of time to make sure she would have the accommodations she needed to have a stress free flight.”

Despite pre-travel preparations, the airline honored their seating request on the way to Hawaii, but denied it on the way home. According to Beth, the problem is that the Air Carrier Access Act doesn't specifically require airlines to provide special accommodations for people with autism.

“Join me and ask the DOT to do the right thing and help make air travel as comfortable as possible for those on the autism spectrum. Tell them to amend the ACAA,” Beth said.

The petition raised over 6,000 supporters to date. Readers wishing to sign Beth Joy's petition should visit her page titled "[Make Air Travel Safer For People With Autism And Service Dogs](#)" on Change.org.



In the meantime, airports across the world are stepping up to the challenge. Last March, Los Angeles airport introduces the world's first self-identification program to ensure people with Autism may enjoy seamless airport journeys.

“By self-identifying, potential incidents with police, airport, and airline personnel can be defused,” Lawrence Rolon, LAWA's coordinator for disability services, said. “Stickers identify the person

with autism, so that if a behavioural incident occurs, the responding personnel will immediately recognize the behaviour is likely a result of autism.”

In 2014, Ireland's main airport Dublin set the European benchmark for passengers with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), helping them make the flying experience a seamless one. Working in cooperation with Irish Autism Action, Dublin Airport created a dedicated page on its website to help parents and carers carefully prepare their journey ahead of getting to the airport.