



Testimony Before the Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Sub. House Bill 110 – Interested Party
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Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today as a proponent on Substitute House Bill 110. My name is Areyah Kaltmann and my wife and I are the directors of the Lori Schottenstein Chabad Center and LifeTown Columbus.

LifeTown is a 5,000 square-foot simulated village in East Columbus/New Albany where children and young adults with special needs gain confidence, self-esteem, and practice critical life skills needed to navigate everyday life in a safe environment. We teach hands-on programming such as financial literacy, time management, and social skills to students all across Central Ohio – oftentimes to children who struggle in the classroom or whose parents or guardians struggle to provide them with the life skills they need to succeed.

We are quite literally a small, simulated town with storefronts inside the town—a movie theater, salon, art studio, doctor and dentist office, library, deli, etc. LifeTown programming fills a tremendous gap in our area by leveling the playing field for thousands of special needs students around Ohio.

We have served Central Ohio since 2008 and began with our work through a small investment from the state. Since then, we have been honored to be a part of the fabric of this community. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we hosted 50-85 students at LifeTown every single day, unlocking the future for thousands of children with disabilities. When the pandemic hit, we were forced to close our doors to in-person engagement, but instead took our educational opportunities **to** the students in need by creating “LifeTown on the Go!” It was a tremendous success, but we are eager for the students to return to LifeTown this fall.

This meaningful programming has helped children and young adults fight depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues, especially as we emerge from the pandemic. For children with special needs to reach their full potential, they deserve specialized programs that go beyond the ordinary. LifeTown seeks to uplift all children to equip them with critical life skills that they need, regardless of the zip code where they live in. At a time when children with disabilities are struggling to learn virtually, specialized learning has never been more crucial for their development.

Today, more than 13 years after our doors opened, we have seen a significantly increased need for LifeTown’s programming and we hope to expand in the coming years with your help. We are grateful and humbled to both you and your colleagues in the House for your recognizing the importance of LifeTown and its mission by including funding with existing dollars to assist in our efforts. We are asking for a modest increase beyond what is currently included in the substitute bill to help jumpstart and expand our educational programming, and I will share that information with your offices. Our request has the support of many throughout Central Ohio, including Ohio Jewish Communities, yet we serve every single child regardless of race, religion, or creed.

I understand that you have many important projects to help fund with limited resources. I can assure you that your contribution to LifeTown serve many more students in need throughout Central Ohio in the months and years to come.

I thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.