



Testimony Before the Ohio House Finance Committee
Rabbi Areyah Kaltmann, Executive Director, LifeTown Columbus
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Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the Ohio House Finance Committee: My name is Rabbi Areyah Kaltmann and I am the Executive Director of LifeTown Columbus. LifeTown is a nonprofit organization that has been making a positive impact on the lives of individuals with special needs and their families since 2008. Friendship Circle, our teenage and college student mentorship program began in 2000 and is the first Friendship Circle program in Ohio.

Our organization provides a variety of programs and services designed to enhance the quality of life for young people with special needs and help them reach their full potential. From social and recreational activities to teaching real life skills and providing emotional support, we are the only medium in the state of Ohio that actively teaches students with special needs financial literacy and provides emotional support. We also teach multiple skills in job development and offer a wide range of resources that help individuals with special needs thrive in a safe environment for children to learn by making mistakes.

One of the most notable aspects of LifeTown Columbus is our state-of-the-art facility, which is specifically designed to meet the needs of individuals with special needs. Our facility located in New Albany includes a fully functioning Main Street, complete with a bank, grocery store, movie theater, and more, providing individuals with special needs the opportunity to practice real-life skills in a safe and supportive environment. The facility also features a sensory gym, art studio, among other resources, which cater to the unique needs of individuals with special needs. The LifeTown campus includes a STEM center for the students to learn 21st century skills including 3D printing, with plans to expand to offering software development training.

Another aspect of LifeTown Columbus that sets it apart is its commitment to collaboration and community building. The organization works closely with local businesses, school districts, and community organizations to provide a wide range of services and resources for young people who need extra attention. Our premier program is called Stop to Live, an innovative program that helps stop substance abuse in kids with special needs. Children with special needs are 2 to 4 times more susceptible to addiction. The program we created is the only curriculum in the nation that teaches prevention of opiate addiction to children with disabilities. It has been praised for its success by ADAMH and the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Ohio Department of Education, and Nationwide Children's Hospital, all of whom with we regularly partner.

In addition to its facilities and community partnerships, LifeTown Columbus also offers a variety of programs and services designed to promote independence and self-sufficiency for these individuals. These programs include vocational training, job placement services, and financial literacy classes for our older student attendees. By providing these resources, LifeTown Columbus helps Central Ohio students gain the skills and confidence they need to succeed in the workplace and beyond. We provide a safe and

supportive environment, a wide range of resources and services, and a commitment to community building and collaboration for children that need it most.

Recently, we have been honored to host Governor DeWine, Chairman Edwards, Vice Chairman LaRe, Representative Jarrells, Representative Abdullahi, as well as all three of Central Ohio's Representatives to Congress (Congressmen Mike Carey and Troy Balderson, and Congresswoman Joyce Beatty) at our facility to meet our students on separate occasions. My sincere thanks to each of you for attending. I hope that everyone who visits LifeTown has seen the important work we do to become a valuable resource for individuals with special needs and a beacon of hope for the entire community. I know we have tours scheduled with several of you, and your Senate colleagues, in the weeks ahead and we look forward to hosting each of you.

The vast majority of our funds come from private donations. However, in the last budget in the 134th General Assembly, this body was generous enough to allocate \$225,000 each of the past two fiscal years from an existing line item to support our programs, staff development, enhance or curriculum, and to help expand our work to the counties beyond Franklin County. **I am proud to say that we were able to do just that and, on average, we now host between 50 and 75 special needs students at LifeTown every day of the week thanks to your help!**

There is more we can do, and we are simply asking to maintain the generous allocation you previously provided once again. My testimony also includes letters of support from individuals across Ohio who have helped make LifeTown what it is today.

Thank you for your time and attention today. May G-d bless each of you and I thank you for your consideration of our request.