

Chair Ghanbari, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Homeland Security Committee, my name is Sandy Hallett. On behalf of myself as a parent, I am writing to ask your support for HB 321, a bill to enact a statewide 9-1-1 special needs database and to ensure appropriate funding for this endeavor. I strongly support the creation of such a resource.

I am first and foremost a mother of a young man with autism. I am also the Seneca County Family and Children First Director. Many positions have led me to you here today. I was on the Seneca County Board of Developmental Disabilities for 14 years. I was also a Community and Family Liaison and Parent Mentor through programming at The Ohio State University and the Ohio Department of Education. I have been a speaker and member of a focus group at OCALI. I am also the author of 2 books on autism and the co-founder of a parent support group in Tiffin, Ohio which has been ongoing for 15 years. Currently, I attend advocacy meetings with Director Kimberly Hauck at the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities with other parents from our community.

I live in Tiffin, Ohio, which is in rural Seneca County. I have trained first responders with how to deal with special needs. I know how to handle most individuals with autism spectrum disorder when they are upset. Sadly, it can be very different when it is your own family member. I have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress syndrome due to my son's behaviors. A lot of parents with children with autism or mental illnesses are.

I have had to call 9-1-1 numerous times for my son. When calling 9-1-1 you are in a crisis mode. You have to explain in detail to the dispatcher that your 23-year-old son is either having a grand mal seizure or that he is physically assaulting you. Due to medication reactions, obsessive compulsive disorder, and his lack of communication, it makes it impossible to reason with him in a fight-or-flight response. My son has severe ASD and is non-verbal. He is also very strong. He is 6-foot-tall and 265 pounds. It doesn't matter who is trying to calm him, he will come after anyone. It's irrelevant to him if it is an officer of the law or a paramedic. This is also a problem when he is in an ambulance, and he wakes up in pain and is scared and can't communicate his feelings.

When first calling 9-1-1 you are in a heightened emotional state. Explaining this trauma and my son's diagnoses in detail to the dispatcher, and then rehashing it to the officers and paramedics is necessary, but it can be retraumatizing and bring on an unwanted sense of embarrassment as a parent. He doesn't mean to hurt me; he just doesn't understand. He can't articulate pain or other feelings because of his cognitive disability and his communication barrier.

This bill could be a game changer for parents and guardians like me. It can also help me professionally to recommend this to other parents who may not know how important this bill could be for their loved ones.

Thank you for your time and for your consideration of this incredibly necessary tool to help such a vulnerable population.