

Chair Ghanbari, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Homeland Security Committee, my name is Erin Simmons, I am a special needs parent and advocate. I am here to ask for your support for House Bill 321, a bill to enact a statewide 9-1-1 special needs database.

I serve on the Ohio Early Intervention Advisory Council as Co-Chair, I'm on the Ohio Early Childhood Advisory Council, the Ohio PROMISE Advisory Council, I am President of the Seneca County Board of Developmental Disabilities, I am the Secretary for the Seneca County Family and Children First Council, and I also facilitate a support group for parents of children who have autism. I am a Parent Mentor for North Central Ohio Educational Service Center, where I help parents/guardians and school employees work through any issues or concerns that may arise throughout the process of developing and implementing an Individualized Education Program. I am also the mother to six children. Four of those children have special needs, including our son who has severe non-verbal autism.

I have spoken many times around the state on not only my fears, but many parents' fears, of what happens in a crisis if I can not be my son's voice. He, like many other children and adults, can not communicate his needs, fears or pain he may be experiencing. My son will not respond the way one would expect. He will fight, resist, run, and will not understand any verbal attempts to calm or help him. My son can not keep himself safe, he is unaware of dangers and the consequences of his actions.

This database will ensure that my son's needs can and will be communicated to our first responders who need to help him. This knowledge will quickly inform emergency personnel to prepare them for what they can expect. This will provide a sense of security and relief to not only myself, but so many other parents and families, while in our absence or inability to speak on behalf of our children. Knowing that emergency responders will understand my son's behaviors are not out of malicious intent, but his basic instinct, lack of communication and understanding of the events that are happening. This will help prepare emergency responders to understand a different approach that is necessary to carry out their duties.

While I understand that we can not stop the trauma these events will cause our children, this will go a long way to not add to the trauma they might experience. This is the right next step to help our children and adults have a voice and be understood. In turn this will also ensure our emergency personnel are equipped with the most information we can give them to help serve our community members.

This knowledge will provide an understanding and expectation of the unexpected behavior. This database will help make an invisible disability...visible. Thank you for your time and consideration in support of House Bill 321.