



Testimony Before the Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Rabbi Areyah Kaltmann, Executive Director, LifeTown Columbus
June 8, 2023

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Ohio Senate 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. **Our goals at LifeTown: teach children with special needs financial literacy, help young people fight opiate use, and curb the scourge of teenage suicide, particularly among special needs children who often feel isolated.**

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 non-profit 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 Central Ohio 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 Dolan, Senators Gavarone, Reynolds, Kunze, Brenner, and Craig as well as all three of Central Ohio's Representatives to Congress (Congressmen Carey and Balderson, and Congresswoman Joyce Beatty) at our facility to meet our students on separate occasions. My sincere thanks to each of them 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. We would look forward to hosting each of you at a time of your choosing.

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 our 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!**

The Ohio House of Representatives renewed that \$225,000 annual allocation in Amended Substitute House Bill 33 and it was removed in yesterday's substitute bill. I am here today making an impassioned plea to restore the earmark for LifeTown in the omnibus amendment. I spend every day with these children and just came back from Camp Kindness, where inner city children with disabilities experience a safe and loving summer camp where they are uplifted unconditionally. There is more we can do, and I hope that we will be able to restore the generous allocation you previously provided in the last budget.

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.