



**Proponent Testimony Before the Ohio Senate Health Committee
Rabbi Areyah Kaltmann, Executive Director, LifeTown Columbus
May 10, 2023**

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Ohio Senate Health 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 for students with special needs, began in 2000 and is the first Friendship Circle program in Ohio, and the second program of its kind worldwide!

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 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 we are asking the Senate to maintain that appropriation.

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.



JEFFREY SCHOTTENSTEIN

FOUNDER/CEO TACKMA &
CHIEF INVESTMENT OFFICER, SEI INC.

The Honorable Mike DeWine
Governor of Ohio
77 South High Street, 30th Floor
Columbus, Ohio

December 22, 2022

Dear Governor DeWine,

I am writing to express my support for LifeTown of Columbus, an organization that is doing vital work to promote mental health and prevent teen suicide in Central Ohio. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10-24 in the United States; In 2018, nearly 7,000 young people in this age range died by suicide.

I have had the pleasure of visiting LifeTown on several occasions and have seen firsthand the life-changing experiences they provide for children through their programming and in-person, model town.

Not only does LifeTown focus on mental health and suicide prevention, but they also provide financial literacy, substance abuse prevention, and soft skills training to children and families throughout Columbus and the surrounding region. I am grateful for your support of LifeTown in the FY 2022-2023 Operating Budget, which included a \$450,000 appropriation in GRF ALI 336421 under the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

As demand for LifeTown's services continues to grow, it is crucial that this funding is maintained. I urge you to recommend continuing the existing funding level for LifeTown in your budget proposal to the Ohio House in the weeks ahead, so that they can continue to broaden their reach and make a positive impact on the lives of even more children in Central Ohio.

Thank you for your dedication and thoughtful leadership in the State of Ohio. I hope that this letter finds you well, and please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Schottenstein

December 18, 2022

The Honorable Mike DeWine
Governor of Ohio
77 South High Street, 30th Floor
Columbus, Ohio

Dear Governor DeWine,

As you know, one of the reasons Ohio is such an incredible place to live, work, and raise a family is that we are blessed by organizations and individuals that strive to have a positive impact on our communities every single day. One of those organizations is LifeTown of Columbus, operated by my friends Rabbi Areyah and Esther Kaltmann.

LifeTown provides life-changing experiences for children in Central Ohio through their programming and in-person, model town that provides a fun, controlled way to learn critical life skills. The LifeTown experience focuses on mental health and suicide prevention, financial literacy, substance abuse prevention, and soft skills. I know you have visited LifeTown on several occasions and have seen firsthand how critical their work is to the children and families throughout Columbus and the surrounding region.

Thanks to your support in the FY 2022-2023 Operating Budget, LifeTown received a \$450,000 appropriation in GRF ALI 336421 under the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. This appropriation has allowed LifeTown to help and mentor hundreds of students this year alone and their work is not yet complete.

As demand rises for the LifeTown experience, this continued funding will be critical. It is my hope that when you propose your budget to the Ohio House in the weeks ahead that you will recommend continuing the existing funding level for LifeTown. This will allow them to broaden their reach to even more children throughout Central Ohio.

You are a dedicated and thoughtful leader who has done amazing things for the State of Ohio. Thank you for your consideration of LifeTown's continuing appropriation and please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to speak further.

Sincerely,

Alan A. Stockmeister
Owner and President
Foremost Management, Inc.