

Committees:

Medicaid Committee (Chair)
Health Committee
Government Oversight Committee
Community Revitalization Committee



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Representative Jennifer Gross
The Ohio House of Representatives

Chairwoman White, Vice Chairwoman Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify alongside my joint sponsor honorable Representative Thomas in support of House Bill 359.

After searching for over 24 hours, law enforcement, first responders, and community volunteers, found 6-year-old Joshua Al-Lateef Jr., a child with autism, deceased in a pond near his home in my district, West Chester on November 20, 2024. HB 359 is our effort to, advocate for change to prevent other families, like this precious young boy's, from enduring such unbearable loss.

In Joshua's memory, we are proposing the Joshua Alert, a statewide alert system tailored for missing children with autism and other developmental disabilities. These children face unique risks when they go missing because they may be nonverbal, may not respond to their own name, or may gravitate toward dangerous areas, such as water, as they may in some cases, be unable to assess the of the risks of their surroundings.

Supported by numerous local communities, the Joshua Alert aims to strengthen Ohio's response by mobilizing law enforcement and emergency personnel immediately upon a report of a missing child with a diagnosed developmental disability, leveraging existing alert infrastructure to notify the public more quickly, and engaging broadcasters and media partners to amplify the alert.

It is with a heavy heart and deep honor that I sponsor this legislation for one of my constituents and ask for your support of H.B. 359 to honor Joshua's memory with action that saves lives.

Thank you for hearing our testimony on H.B. 359. We are happy to answer any questions at this time.