

PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF:  
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Good afternoon Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and distinguished members of the Children and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

My name is Amanda Fontana and I live in New Philadelphia, Ohio. I am a concerned parent of an adult daughter who lives with severe developmental disabilities and is Deaf. I am in strong support of HB 359, a critical piece of legislation that will expand our state's emergency alert systems to include some of our most vulnerable children.

As a mother of a now adult with Developmental Disabilities, I can tell you that her going missing as a child or even now is one of my greatest fears. This bill recognizes that a child with developmental disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder or any other mental impairments who goes missing faces unique and immediate dangers that necessitate an urgent, comprehensive response.

The current AMBER Alert system has proven its life saving potential for abducted children. However, it often fails to cover missing children with disabilities, who face equally critical threats even when abduction is not suspected. These children have a heightened risk of danger, often experience communication challenges and we all know that time is a critical factor when a child goes missing. This legislation removes ambiguity for law enforcement agencies by clarifying that a missing child with a developmental disability meets the criteria for an immediate emergency alert. It also leverages community engagement by notifying the public of key details of the child which could ultimately save their life.

The AMBER Alert system was created in response to tragedy, and this legislation, inspired by the heartbreaking story of Joshua Al-Lateef Jr. in Ohio, seeks to prevent similar losses in our communities. It is a proactive step that will save lives. We have the technology and public willingness to act swiftly. The only thing standing in the way is policy. By passing HB 359, we can ensure that our emergency systems respond with the urgency, clarity, and compassion that all of our children deserve. Every child is precious, and we must do everything in our power to protect them.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to support HB 359.

Sincerely,

*Amanda S. Fontana, MSW*

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