

Chair White, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the committee — thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and thank you, Chair White and Ranking Member Lett, for bringing this compassionate bill forward.

My name is Susan Cavendish, and I am the mother of a 4-year-old autistic boy named Kieran. When I saw the news that Joshua was missing, I couldn't look away. I stayed up that night — praying, hoping, refreshing my phone over and over — just willing for him to be found safe. When I learned the outcome, I broke down. Because every parent of an autistic child knows that fear — the fear that one moment, one door left unlocked, one distracted second — could mean your child is gone.

Kieran is prone to wandering. He doesn't always respond when we call his name. He loves water and doesn't understand danger. The thought of Kieran being lost — alone, unable to tell someone who he is or where he belongs — is unbearable. That fear lives in the back of my mind every single day. And I know I'm not alone — every parent and caregiver in our community carries that same heavy worry.

“Joshua's Alert” would mean that if the unthinkable happens — if a child like my son goes missing — the public would know immediately, and we'd have a chance to bring them home safely. Time is everything in those moments. This alert could be the difference between tragedy and a miracle.

Please, I urge you to pass H.B. 359. Let's make sure no other family has to live through the heartbreak that Joshua's family endured. Thank you, Chair White and Ranking Member Lett, for your leadership and compassion in making sure our children — children like Kieran and Joshua — are seen, protected, and never forgotten.