



**Testimony Before the Ohio House Finance Committee**

**Rabbi Areyah Kaltmann, Executive Director**

**March 11, 2025**

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chairman Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today as a proponent on House Bill 96. My name is Areyah Kaltmann and my wife and I are the directors of the Lori Schottenstein Chabad Center and LifeTown Columbus.

LifeTown is a 5,000 square-foot simulated village in East Columbus/New Albany where children and young adults with special needs gain confidence, self-esteem, and practice critical life skills needed to navigate everyday life in a safe environment. We teach hands-on programming such as financial literacy, time management, and social skills to students all across Central Ohio – oftentimes to children who struggle in the classroom or whose parents or guardians struggle to provide them with the life skills they need to succeed.

We are quite literally a small, simulated town with storefronts inside the town—a movie theater, salon, art studio, doctor and dentist office, library, deli, etc. LifeTown programming fills a tremendous gap in our area by leveling the playing field for thousands of special needs students around Ohio. We have served Central Ohio since 2008 and began with our work through a small investment from the state. Since then, we have been honored to be a part of the fabric of this community.

This meaningful programming has helped children and young adults fight depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues, especially as we emerge from the pandemic. For children with special needs to reach their full potential, they deserve specialized programs that go beyond the ordinary. LifeTown seeks to uplift all children to equip them with critical life skills that they need, regardless of the zip code where they live. At a time when children with disabilities are struggling to learn virtually, specialized learning has never been more crucial for their development.

Today, more than 17 years after our doors opened, we have seen a significantly increased need for LifeTown's programming and we hope to expand in the coming years with your help. We are grateful to the General Assembly for its past support for our efforts and for the Governor for including us in his proposed operating budget for this year. And we are particularly humbled to have hosted Lt. Governor Tressel and other members of this body for our Day of Service a few weeks ago.

I understand that you have many important projects to help fund with limited resources. I can assure you that your contribution to LifeTown will serve many more students in need throughout Central Ohio in the months and years to come.

I thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.