



# Clermont County Board of Developmental Disabilities

Building Skills... Empowering People  
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*Dan Ottke, Superintendent*

## Proponent Testimony on House Bill 359

Dan Ottke, Superintendent  
Clermont County Board of Developmental Disabilities  
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Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 359, also known as “Joshua’s Law”.

By expanding a Statewide Emergency Alert System to include notifying the public of a child with a developmental disability that has gone missing, it will provide a quicker response, that is so vitally needed, especially when that child may gravitate towards bodies of water and put themselves at serious risk of drowning.

Over the past few years, we, here in the Southwest Ohio area, have received reports and have seen multiple media reports of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder who have wandered away from their home or from a caregiver. These occurrences happen quickly and, in every circumstance, that child has found their way to a body of water near their location. Early in my career as Superintendent, this circumstance led to the drowning death of a child here in Clermont County. There have been similar tragedies and near tragedies in the Southwest Ohio region over the past few years.

Just last summer, a local Township Trustee, who is familiar with our services, reached out to me to ask if there was anything that could be done legislatively to address what appeared to be a growing concern. After doing some research and learning the State of Kentucky had an alert system, like an Amber alert, for situations where a child with autism had wandered from their home, I reached out to the Ohio Association of County Boards. Not long after, both OACB and I learned of the legislation proposed by House Sponsors, Representatives Thomas and Gross, and have been committed to seeing House Bill 359 receive the support it so generously needs for those we serve in our community.

The significance of having a statewide system that can be utilized by local first responders that can be engaged quickly to alert the public to a missing child with a disability, can exponentially broaden the amount of people in a community looking for that child, especially around bodies of water, where a fast response is so vital to avoid future tragedies.

As you all are undoubtedly aware, “Joshua’s Law” is named after Joshua Al-Lateef Jr., a six-year-old boy who tragically drowned in a pond in Butler County in November of 2024. I am thankful for Joshua’s mother, Jonisa Cook, advocating for this effort on behalf of children and families across the State of Ohio who face similar worries for their child. I am thankful to Representatives Thomas and Gross for their sponsorship of House Bill 359.

By championing this effort, I hope that the committee will favorably report this bill for the full consideration of your colleagues. By advancing this legislation, you are joining in a worthwhile cause to significantly improve safety of children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Ohio.

Thank you for your time and consideration.