



Proponent Testimony HB 359

Thank you, Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee, for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 359. This Bill is intended to clarify the statewide emergency alert system in cases of missing autistic or developmentally disabled children and to name the alert the Joshua Alert. My name is Jen Powers Alge and I am the Director of Policy and Civil Rights at the Arc of Ohio. The Arc of Ohio is a grassroots organization which advocates for human rights, personal dignity and community participation of individuals with developmental disabilities through legislative and social action, information and education, local chapter supports, and family involvement.

The Arc of Ohio is a statewide organization but I live in southwest Ohio. I live a few miles from the family of Joshua Al-Lateef, Jr., the 6-year-old from West Chester who fatally drowned near his home just hours after going missing in November 2024. I also have a son with autism and this event shook me, as an advocate and as a mother. The community came out and everyone wanted to help, but the efforts of neighbors and friends was not enough to save little Joshua. This policy is a good step in prioritizing the safety of children with autism, especially our most vulnerable non-verbal children in our society. Several states have taken similar steps in protecting children with autism and others have bills pending. This is good policy but more training and supports are necessary for this population.

We continue to have a caregiver crisis and a lack of options available for families who care for children with autism and other developmental disabilities. Our children often need 24/7 supervision and are the most vulnerable to drowning. Butler County Board of Developmental Disabilities is in fiscal emergency and, despite their ongoing services and good leadership, there is not enough help for families who need it in this region. We need to ensure that community supports for families is strong or we are going to have

more tragedies like this that could have been avoided with more direct support care in place.

The Arc of Ohio supports House Bill 359 and this Legislature's effort to prioritize the safety of children with autism and other developmental disabilities. Thank you for your work on this bill and for the opportunity to testify on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jen Powers Alge". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "P".

Jen Powers Alge, JD.

Director of Policy and Civil Rights

The Arc of Ohio