

As a legislator, I carry both the responsibility and the power to shape systems that are meant to serve and protect. Yet, the truth is, our systems—our laws, our policies, our budgets—do not protect everyone equally. That inequity is painfully clear when we examine how Black girls and young women of color are treated within the current AMBER Alert framework.

In 2022, Black children made up 61% of all missing youth in Ohio, despite only comprising 16% of the state’s child population. Too often, these children are mislabeled as “runaways,” a classification that disqualifies them from receiving AMBER Alerts and the urgent, life-saving attention that comes with it. They are overlooked by media, under-prioritized by systems, and, when found, criminalized rather than cared for. These are not isolated failures—they are the result of deeply rooted systemic neglect.

That’s why I’ve introduced SB 178. This bill will establish a statewide task force focused on addressing the disproportionate rates at which women and children of color go missing in Ohio. The task force will:

1. Develop policy recommendations for state agencies,
2. Educate communities on the risks facing women and children of color,
3. Collect accurate data, and
4. Launch public awareness campaigns.

The task force outlined in Senate Bill 178 will include key state officials or their designees—such as the directors of Job and Family Services and Criminal Justice Services, as well as the superintendent of the State Highway Patrol. They will serve alongside legislative appointees representing both majority and minority leadership in the House and Senate. Appointed members must reflect the diversity of Ohio and represent communities directly impacted by the crisis at hand. They are expected to have experience in cultural competency and serve two-year terms.

The task force will operate without compensation, except for reimbursement of necessary expenses, and will be required to report its findings and recommendations to legislative leaders every two years, ensuring transparency and accountability to the public.

This effort is informed by years of advocacy, by experts like Elesondra DeRomano of STARS and Dawn Rowe of Girl Vow, and by the courageous voices of survivors across Ohio.

Other states have acted—California launched the “Ebony Alert” in 2024, Minnesota created a state office to investigate missing Black women and girls, and New York passed similar legislation last year. Ohio must join them—not just in name, but in action.

These girls are not invisible. They are being ignored. And that is a choice we make—or refuse to make—with every policy we pass or fail to fund. Let us act with the urgency these young women

and girls deserve—not just today on this press conference, but tomorrow in the bills we write, in the budgets we fight for, and in the systems we hold accountable. We cannot say we are fighting inequity for our missing children if we are not also fighting the systems that make these disparities possible. Our children are watching. And they are waiting to be seen.

Thank you, and I urge your support for this critical legislation.