**Committees:**

* Public Utilities – Ranking Member
* Ways and Means – Ranking Member
* Higher Education -- Ranking Member
* Energy and Natural Resources – Ranking Member
* Insurance and Financial Institutions
* Correctional Institution Inspection Committee
* Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review
* Rules and Reference Committee



**Senator Sandra Williams**

**21st Ohio Senate District**

**Senate Bill 157 Sponsor Testimony**

**Education Committee**

**October 1, 2019**

Chairman Lehner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education Committee thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 157.

Currently, school districts are required to notify parents and or guardians one hundred and twenty minutes after the start of the school day of their child’s unexcused absence. Senate Bill 157 would require school districts to contact parents or guardians within sixty minutes from the start of the school day, if their child has been marked absent, or if there is not an excused absence on file. This legislation will permit the Department the Education to assess an appropriate penalty, if it is determined that the school has failed to comply with notifying the parent or guardian. In the 132nd General Assembly, a similar provision was added as an amendment to House Bill 66 and became effective in April of this year. The purpose of this legislation is to enhance the precautionary measures to ensure that every child is safe, specifically those students who are not transported by the school systems.

On January 26, 2017, 14-year-old Alianna DeFreeze went missing in Cleveland, Ohio. Her mother walked to the bus stop with her, watched her get on the bus, and unfortunately, Alianna never made it to her second bus. She was taking public transportation to school when she disappeared. Reportedly, her mother was not alerted of Alianna’s absence until 4:15pm when she contacted the school, E-Prep, regarding an upcoming PTA meeting. The mother notified police shortly thereafter. Alianna’s mutilated body was found four days later in an abandoned house not far from the school and less than one mile away from the police station.

It is imperative that parents be notified immediately if their children are not present in school. In a missing person’s case, every hour is vital. The search for Alianna could have begun hours earlier if the school had alerted Alianna’s mother in a timely manner.

According to the Ohio Attorney General’s Ohio Missing Children 2017 Clearinghouse report, 20,043 children were reported missing in 2017. Although 98 percent of the children were found safe, two percent or around 421 children were not found and three children were found dead. In 2017, there were 41 attempted child abduction cases and 37 percent of the incidents happened when the children were walking to or from school.[[1]](#footnote-1) The 2018 clearinghouse documented 19 attempted child abductions and just fewer than half of the incidents, 48 percent happened while children were walking to or from school. [[2]](#footnote-2)

Considering this, we must continue to be proactive to keep our children safe and hold our educational institutions accountable for non-compliance. Senate Bill 82, of the 132nd General Assembly, the comparative bill to Senate Bill 157 passed in the Senate Education Committee 10-0 and in the Senate Chamber 33-0 in the previous General Assembly.

Chairman and members of the committee this completes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.

1. <https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Files/Reports/Missing-Children-s-Clearinghouse-Reports/2017-MCCH-Annual-Report_WEB> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Files/Reports/Missing-Children-s-Clearinghouse-Reports/2018-MCCH-Annual-Report_WEB> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)