



February 6, 2024

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities (KCDD), thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare in support of SB 371, which expands the Kansas Silver Alert Plan to provide public notice of missing persons 18 years of age or older who have an intellectual disability. My name is Callie Simmons, Policy and Program Analyst for KCDD and lead for our programming in the area of abuse, neglect and exploitation (ANE).

KCDD's mission is to empower individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families to lead systems change, build capacity, and advocate for inclusive, integrated, accessible communities where everyone belongs and thrives throughout our state. KCDD is made up of self-advocates, family members, state agencies, and other partners from around Kansas. We serve Kansans with I/DD, and support family members and caregivers, through advocacy, public policy, and education. As part of our five year state plan, the Council seeks opportunities to enhance our state's public service and supports system to protect individuals with I/DD from harm through measures that protect individuals as well as increasing protections from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

As you know, SB 371 amends the Kansas Silver Alert Plan to include individuals with intellectual disabilities age 18 and over. We commend Senator Holscher for her efforts to spearhead this important legislation that aligns Kansas with several other states who have enacted state laws to allow for state-wide coordination with all relevant departments within the state to work together to find a missing person.

Research indicates that there is a higher prevalence of wandering among individuals with Autism and intellectual disabilities, both children and adults, similar to those with Alzheimer's or Dementia.<sup>1</sup> Wandering occurs when an individual leaves a safe area, a family member or a responsible caregiver without having a specific destination or clear purpose, indicating a lack of self awareness on the part of the person and putting their own safety at risk. Some individuals with disabilities can experience challenges related to safety issues and require assistance when communicating with others.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that one in 44 children have autism spectrum disorder and that more than half, or about 60% were reported wandering. Over a

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<sup>1</sup> Solomon, Olga, and Mary C. Lawlor. "Beyond V40.31: Narrative phenomenology of wandering in autism and dementia." *Culture, medicine and psychiatry* 42, no. 2 (2018): 206.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-017-9562-7>.

five year period, a third of those with autism who did wander ended up in harm's way and needed serious medical intervention, or sadly, died. This is often due to individuals being drawn to water or areas of high traffic. Not all individuals age out of this behavior.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, individuals with intellectual disabilities must be included in the emergency response system. The protocol and enforcement of the Silver Alert must also stay strong to mitigate any risks of abuse or neglect.<sup>3</sup>

KCDD is working in a multifaceted approach to address these systematic issues. In addition to supporting this bill, we are also working to expand training for law enforcement and first responders with key disability stakeholders across Kansas as well as continue to have a dedicated focus on all issues related to ANE through my dedicated KCDD ANE Program.

Moreover, as this legislation advances through the 2024 session, KCDD is committed to working alongside self advocates, stakeholders, law enforcement, and the Kansas Attorney General's Office to help develop and implement training efforts, provide education and ensure that if expanded, the Silver Alert Plan addresses the needs of the individuals we support to help ensure their safety.

On behalf of KCDD, thank you for considering my testimony and more importantly, the impact your leadership can have with passing SB 371 to protect Kansans with intellectual disabilities in our state.

Callie Simmons  
Policy and Program Analyst  
Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities  
[callie@kcdd.org](mailto:callie@kcdd.org)

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<sup>2</sup> McIlwain, Lori, and Wendy Fournier. "Mortality & Risk In ASD Wandering/Elopement 2011-2016". *National Autism Association (2017)*.

<https://nationalautismassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/NAAMortalityRiskASDElopement.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://ag.ks.gov/docs/default-source/documents/silver-alert-law-enforcement-policy.pdf> and [https://ag.ks.gov/docs/default-source/documents/silver-alert-protocol.pdf?sfvrsn=6da76fd6\\_4](https://ag.ks.gov/docs/default-source/documents/silver-alert-protocol.pdf?sfvrsn=6da76fd6_4)