



LAURA KELLY, Governor • KATHY KECK, Chairperson • SARA HART WEIR, Executive Director

“To empower individuals with I/DD and their families to lead systems change, build capacity, and advocate for inclusive, integrated, accessible communities where everyone belongs and thrives.”

Kansas Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

March 20, 2023

Testimony in Support of SB 287

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding Senate Bill (SB) 287, a bill to add vulnerable communities, including Kansans with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), cognitive impairments and dementia to the Kansas Silver Alert Plan.

My name is Sara Hart Weir, Executive Director of the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities (KCDD). ***The mission of our Council is to empower individuals with I/DD and their families to lead systems change, build capacity, and advocate for inclusive, integrated, accessible communities where everyone belongs and thrives.***

We serve Kansans with I/DD 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 whether through measures that protect individuals and to ensure we prevent abuse, neglect and exploitation. We believe the passage of this bill is certainly a step our Kansas Legislature can take to further protect our most vulnerable Kansans.

As you know, SB 287 amends the Kansas Silver Alert Plan to include vulnerable persons, including individuals with I/DD, who are age 18 and up.

We know that there is a higher prevalence of wandering in our I/DD population - both in children and adults. Wandering happens when an individual leaves a safe area, a family member or even a caregiver responsible caregiver, putting one’s safety at risk. Some children and adults with disabilities, such as those with ASD or I/DD, can sometimes experience challenges related to safety issues and require assistance when communicating with others.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in 44 children have autism spectrum disorder and that more than half, or about 60%, were reported to wander¹. Over a five-year period, a third of those with Autism who did wander ended up in harm's way and needed serious medical intervention or, even worse, died. This is often due to individuals being drawn to water or areas of high traffic². Therefore, it is critical that individuals with I/DD be fully included in our state and local emergency response systems.

KCDD remains dedicated to ensuring individuals with I/DD remain a top priority when it comes to ensuring that all vulnerable Kansans are located as quickly as possible, when missing, so as to prevent serious harm from occurring. Again, we believe SB 287 is yet another measure Kansas can take to protect our community.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Disability and Safety: Information on Wandering (Elopement).” 2019. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandsafety/wandering.html>.

² 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>



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On behalf of KCDD, thank you for considering my testimony and more importantly, the impact your leadership can have with passing this bill to protect Kansans with I/DD in our great state.

Sara Hart Weir
Executive Director
Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities