



Dear Legislator:

We are writing as leaders of the Autism Society of America's affiliates across the state of Ohio. The Autism Society and our nationwide network of affiliates connect people to resources they need through education, advocacy, support, information and referral, and community programming. The Autism Society of Ohio (ASO) is a coalition of the Ohio affiliates of the Autism Society of America and includes the Autism Societies of Central Ohio, Greater Akron, Greater Cleveland, Dayton, Mahoning Valley, and Northwest Ohio. In Ohio, we provide support for the thousands of individuals and families living with Autism throughout the state. We offer a variety of services such as support groups, referrals, adapted community events, first responder and advocacy trainings. One of the most significant difficulties our families are facing relates to safety.

That is why we are glad to see [House Bill 321](#), which would establish a statewide 911 special needs database, to improve safety outcomes. The bill would permit individuals with Autism and other disabilities to register to be included in a 911 database that identifies specific needs to improve outcomes of care. Importantly, 911 responders would be made aware of sensory, communication, medical, or allergy-related circumstances that could be the difference between life and death. For example, some 25 to 30 percent of Autistic people are non-speaking or limited verbal, and are unable to communicate directly; some may use alternative communication. Similarly, 30% of Autistic individuals are intellectually disabled, further complicating communication and understanding of crises. An entry in a 911 database specifying an alternative communication method would enable them to convey urgent medical needs, or for the responder to understand why they are not responding at all.

Data from the Department of Justice indicates that as many as 10% of all 911 calls involve a person with a disability. This means there are many people with disabilities interacting with 911 first responders. Additionally, according to the National Institute of Health, obstacles associated with sensory sensitivities, verbal communication abilities, and slower processing speed significantly impact the efficacy of engagements with healthcare or other emergency professionals.

Some counties in Ohio already have this type of program in place to support individuals who may wander and not be able to communicate who they are, where they live, and other important information contained in the database (Take Me Home). In fact, almost 50% of parents of children and teens with Autism reported wandering after the age of four; while there are not statistics available about adults, this behavior typically continues into adulthood. It would be beneficial for the entire state to implement these safety measures across districts so that all emergency responders can access critical information.



In other states, comparable laws have already been implemented, such as Logan's Law in Georgia, that similarly allows individuals to opt into a 911 database. The law has already changed outcomes for people with disabilities in the state, giving first responders and citizens peace of mind that when there is a crisis, the 911 center can go to the scene knowing they can be prepared to bring the best response possible to the person in crisis.

For the safety of people with disabilities, especially individuals who are non-speaking or have difficulty communicating in a crisis like many people with Autism, we urge you to support House Bill 321 to establish a statewide 911 special needs database. Because the bill is on an opt-in basis, it would give thousands of families and individuals from Ohio the option to increase the effectiveness of their care in case of an emergency. The right to effective 911 care should be an option for all individuals, regardless of their needs.

Sincerely,  
Autism Society of Ohio