



March 20, 2023

TO: Chair Gossage and Member of the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

FR: Nick Wood, Associate Director, InterHab

RE: SB 287 - Expanding the Kansas Silver Alert Plan

Chair Gossage and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share information on behalf of the member organizations of InterHab. Our members serve Kansans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in every part of the state.

We appear today as neutral. There are many reasons to support extending Missing Persons Alerts to individuals with IDD. However, we feel the “vulnerable person” language could conflict or be confused with other definitions of disabilities that are already in state law. States that have passed laws like what is proposed in SB 287 have done so without needing to use the term “vulnerable person”. Other states that do use the term “vulnerable person” have included other qualifying language to make it clear that a “vulnerable person” is someone who has one of these disabilities but has also been determined to be a “missing person”. We would support an amendment to fix this section of the bill and ensure that simply having one of the disabilities mentioned does not automatically make that person “vulnerable”.

Senate Bill 287 will expand the criteria for the state’s Silver Alert public notification system to include those with IDD. Similar to the way an Amber Alert notifies the public about child abductions, Silver Alerts allow law enforcement to reach more people via phone notification and broadcast alerts on TV and radio. Our state has lacked a coordinated, statewide effort focused on recovering missing people with IDD. This bill would help to make recovery efforts more successful and ensure people with IDD are safer.

According to a survey of parents conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 50 percent of children with autism were reported to wander. Of those children, 25 percent were missing long enough to cause concern and were most commonly in danger of drowning or traffic injury.

We believe that expanding Silver Alerts to include Individuals with IDD will also help co-responders be more aware of the needs of this population whenever they have an unplanned encounter. People with IDD often have difficulty understanding social cues and interacting with strangers. They may be very uncomfortable with things that are not familiar to them. According to a 2017 study, about 1 in 5 adolescents on the autism spectrum will be stopped and questioned by police before age 21.

Thank you to the committee for holding a hearing on this matter. Many other states across the country have passed similar laws to expand Silver Alerts to include IDD. We look forward to our state joining this national trend and would like to work with the committee that we think will make the bill stronger.