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Testimony of Cathy Dionne, Executive Director, Autism Society of Maine, in Support of LD 28, An Act to Create an Alert System To Notify the Public When a Person with an Intellectual or Developmental Disability Is Missing

Good morning, Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and members of the committee. My name is Cathy Dionne and I am executive director of the Autism Society. I am here to offer testimony in support of LD 28.

This bill is designed to address a very serious problem: Maine people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities wandering away from their homes and being hurt or even killed. In particular, children between the ages of 3 and 9, are at greatest risk. Several have drowned or come close to it in recent years.

While the bill calls for the creation of a new alert system similar to the Silver Alerts, and we are open to this proposal, we are not wedded to this exact language.

For example, we note that it covers all individuals with developmental disabilities, which may be over inclusive. The bill could be more narrowed to include only persons under age 18, because they are most at risk.

The second change we recommend is that there be a provision to allow parents or guardians to register their family member with public safety officials by providing basic biographical information upfront about family members (height, weight, communication ability (verbal or non-verbal) by filling out a form online if they believe their family members may be at risk of wandering off.

ASM would also support additional measures to address this issue, such as internal law enforcement mechanisms and public education initiatives, for example. We are open to working with legislators, public safety officials and advocacy organizations to address this problem.