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TO: The Honorable Detroit City Council

FROM: David Whitaker, Director
Legislative Policy Division Staff



DATE: August 21, 2025

RE: **RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF HB 4517 AND HB 4518 AMENDING THE MICHIGAN AMBER ALERT ACT AND CHILD ABDUCTION BROADCAST ACT**

Council Member Whitfield-Calloway has requested the Legislative Policy Division (LPD) produce a report and resolution in support of HB 4517 and HB 4518. The bills would amend the Michigan Amber Alert Act and the Child Abduction Broadcast Act.

The Michigan House Families and Veterans Committee unanimously advanced bipartisan legislation to strengthen and modernize the state's Amber Alert System. House Bills 4517 (MCL 28.761, 28.762 and 28.765) and 4518 (MCL 28.753), sponsored by State Representatives Jerry Neyer (R-Shepherd) and Angela Rigas (R-Caledonia), update both the activation criteria and distribution methods for Amber Alerts to ensure faster, more effective responses when children are at risk.¹ The proposals were approved by a 10–0 vote, reflecting a coordinated effort to enhance public safety and provide law enforcement with the tools necessary to protect some of Michigan's most vulnerable residents.²

House Bill 4518, introduced by Angela Rigas, and known as "The Rowan Act" empowers the Michigan State Police to activate the Amber Alert system whenever they believe a child is in danger.³ By granting law enforcement this flexibility, the legislation prioritizes child safety. The amendment would require the Michigan State Police (MSP) to develop policies governing the activation of the state's Amber Alert system which is designed to

¹ *Amber Alert Modernization Plan Unanimously Clears House Committee*, MICH. HOUSE REPUBLICANS (Aug. 15, 2025), <https://gophouse.org/posts/amber-alert-modernization-plan-unanimously-clears-house-committee>.

² Id.

³ *Disabled Children, Custodial Kidnapping Eligible for Amber Alerts Under Bills*, MIRS NEWS (May 2025), <https://home.mirs.news/post/disabled-children-custodial-kidnapping-eligible-for-amber-alerts-under-bills>.

distribute urgent information to Michigan radio and television stations when a child has been abducted and faces imminent risk of serious harm. Amber Alerts are also issued as wireless emergency notifications to mobile devices. Under the bill, MSP policies would be expanded to require activation of the Amber Alert system when a child with special needs is reported missing or when a child is believed by MSP to be in danger following a preliminary investigation conducted by law enforcement.

House Bill 4517, introduced by Rep. Neyer, focuses on modernizing the Amber Alert notification process by expanding its reach through social media platforms. This update would ensure that alerts are disseminated more broadly and quickly to the public, reflecting the communication channels most widely used today. House Bill 4517 proposes amendments additional amendments to the Child Abduction Broadcast Act to permit radio and television stations to broadcast information from the Michigan State Police regarding reports of missing children under the Michigan Amber Alert Act. Currently, the law authorizes broadcasts only in cases involving child abductions. The measure is contingent on the enactment of House Bill 4518.

The introduction of House Bills 4517 and 4518 follows a tragedy in Isabella County that highlighted critical gaps in Michigan's emergency response framework. On August 21, 2024, a six-year-old child, Rowan Milford Morey, was killed in an apparent murder-suicide carried out by his biological father.⁴ Despite repeated concerns raised by Rowan's mother, existing statutory limitations prevented law enforcement from activating the Amber Alert system in a timely manner.⁵ By the time officers conducted a welfare check, Rowan and his father had already lost their lives.⁶ This incident underscored the urgent need to revise state law to provide law enforcement agencies with greater discretion and improved tools for rapid intervention in high-risk situations. Together, these bill measures aim to provide families and law enforcement with critical resources to prevent tragedies similar to Rowan's from occurring in the future.

During committee deliberations, resident testimony highlighting the limitations of Michigan law, particularly its categorization of custodial absences as civil matters, were cited as preventing an Amber Alert from being issued in Rowan's case.⁷ The testimony emphasized how procedural constraints and delays turned critical hours into a tragic failure, reinforcing the necessity of legislative reform.⁸ This direct exposure of systemic gaps catalyzed bipartisan momentum for Michigan House Bills 4517 and 4518, collectively referred to as the "Rowan Act," further legitimizing the urgency of the proposed statutory improvements.⁹

⁴ *Amber Alert Modernization Plan Unanimously Clears House Committee*, MICH. HOUSE REPUBLICANS (Aug. 15, 2025), <https://gophouse.org/posts/amber-alert-modernization-plan-unanimously-clears-house-committee>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Rowan's Act: Mother Pushes for Change in Amber Alert Laws After Son's Death, New Bill Introduced in Lansing*, FOX 17 (Mar. 14, 2025), <https://www.fox17online.com/news/local-news/rowans-act-mother-pushes-for-change-in-amber-alert-laws-after-sons-death-new-bill-introduced-in-lansing>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

BY CITY COUNCIL MEMBER ANGELA WHITFIELD-CALLOWAY

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF HB 4517 AND HB 4518 AMENDING THE MICHIGAN AMBER ALERT ACT AND CHILD ABDUCTION BROADCAST ACT

- WHEREAS** The Michigan AMBER Alert plan is a partnership between law enforcement and the media, facilitating the immediate dissemination of information to the public in certain instances of child abduction through the Emergency Alert System;¹⁰ and
- WHEREAS** The current AMBER Alert Act establishes the legal framework for activating alerts in cases of child abduction, setting criteria and procedures for law enforcement to follow in order to rapidly notify the public and coordinate with media and other agencies; and
- WHEREAS** The AMBER Alert system is principally important in the city of Detroit, a major metropolitan city in close proximity to the Canadian border, underscoring the importance of rapid and widespread communication as essential to increasing safe recovery by law enforcement when and child is abducted; and
- WHEREAS** Current policy imposes limitations on AMBER Alert activations, excluding cases involving runaway children, parental abductions arising from civil custody disputes, and instances in which a child with severe disabilities has wandered off;¹¹ and
- WHEREAS** House Bills 4517 and 4518, collectively referred to as “The Rowan Act,” sponsored by State Representatives Jerry Neyer (R-Shepherd) and Angela Rigas (R-Caledonia), would address the limitation of the AMBER Alert activations, updating the activation criteria and distribution methods for Amber Alerts to ensure faster, more effective responses when children are at risk, and both were unanimously passed (10–0) by the Committee on Veterans and Families on August 12, 2025;¹²
- WHEREAS** House Bill 4518 would specifically expand Michigan State Police (MSP) policies to require activation of the Amber Alert system when a child with special needs is reported missing or when a child is believed by MSP to be in danger following a preliminary investigation conducted by law enforcement; and
- WHEREAS** House Bill 4517, acting as a companion, would focus on modernizing the Amber Alert notification process by expanding its reach through social media platforms; and
- WHEREAS** Collectively, these bills, if enacted, would not only authorize but also require MSP to issue an AMBER Alert for reports of a missing child with special needs, or any missing child whom the department, following a preliminary investigation, reasonably believes to be in imminent danger, thereby enhancing the state’s capacity to respond swiftly and effectively to child-abduction emergencies;¹³ and
- WHEREAS** The enactment of The Rowan Alert is particularly important for the city of Detroit, complementing the recent passage of the Emerald Act, responding directly to community concerns about child safety, and ensuring a coordinated, effective partnership between law enforcement, the public, and media to protect vulnerable children in urgent situations; **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT**
- RESOLVED** That the Detroit City Council strongly urges the Michigan Legislature to enact The Rowan Act, enhancing the authority of the Michigan State Police to issue timely AMBER Alerts for children

¹⁰ Michigan State Police, *Alerts*, Michigan.gov (last visited Aug. 22, 2025), <https://www.michigan.gov/msp/services/alerts>.

¹¹ Id.

¹² Ivy S. Fowler, *House Committee Passes “Rowan Act” to Expedite AMBER Alert System for State Police*, UpNorthLive (Aug. 19, 2025, 9:38 AM), last updated Aug. 19, 2025, 9:49 AM, <https://upnorthlive.com/news/local/rowan-act-expedite-amber-alert-system-state-police-house-representatives-committee-veterans-families-hb-4517-4518-western-michigan-public-safety-policy>.

¹³ Id.

believed to be in danger, including those with special needs, thereby strengthening public safety, protecting vulnerable children, and supporting law enforcement in rapid response efforts; **NOW BE IT FINALLY**

RESOLVED That the Detroit City Clerk shall transmit copies of this resolution to the Mayor, the Governor of Michigan, the Speaker of Michigan House, the Majority and Minority Leaders of the Senate, the Chief of the Detroit Police Department and the Michigan State Police to affirm the City's commitment to safeguarding children and promoting swift, coordinated action in cases of child abduction.