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TEXAS HOUSE PASSES “ATHENA ALERT” BILL

AUSTIN – The Texas House overwhelmingly passed an “Athena Alert” bill on Tuesday, allowing law enforcement to quickly issue a regional alert when a child goes missing without confirmation of an abduction.

The legislation — named in memory of 7-year-old Athena Strand who was kidnapped and killed by a FedEx Driver last year — is intended to close the gap between the time a child vanishes and a statewide AMBER Alert may be issued. It would allow law enforcement to activate an alert in a regional area – within a 100-mile radius and to adjacent counties – of where a child is believed to have gone missing or was last seen.

House Bill 3556, authored by Rep. Lynn Stucky (R-Sanger), now heads to the Senate. It will be carried by Senators Tan Parker (R-Flower Mound) and Angela Paxton (R-McKinney) in the next chamber. If passed there, it will make its way to the Governor’s desk.



“I would like to thank Rep. Stucky and other lawmakers for their support of an Athena Alert in honor of my daughter,” said Maitlyn Gandy, Athena’s mother. “An Athena Alert will give law enforcement the ability to quickly notify the local public about a missing child in their area – even if the case doesn’t meet the strict criteria for a statewide AMBER Alert.

“If a localized alert had been issued as soon as Athena went missing, it could have made a difference. We will never know, but I do know that I never want another parent to feel the helplessness that I felt. Law enforcement wanted to sound an alert, but under the current law’s criteria, they just couldn’t.”



On Wednesday, November 30, 2022, Athena was playing in the front yard of her father’s Paradise home in rural Wise County when she went missing. An

AMBER Alert wasn't issued until the following afternoon – about 24 hours later – when investigators determined that her disappearance met the strict criteria for an AMBER Alert, which is codified in Texas Government Code Section 411.355 and requires law enforcement to “believe that a child has been abducted.”

The following day, on Friday, Athena was found dead about six miles from her father's home. A FedEx Ground driver, Tanner Horner, was arrested and charged with capital murder in her killing and kidnapping. He is facing the death penalty.

Rep. Stucky, who represents Wise County as part of District 64, filed the “Athena Alert” bill in March after consulting with Gandy and her attorneys at Varghese Summersett, which have filed a wrongful death lawsuit against Horner, FedEx and contractor Big Topspin in March.

Last month, Gandy and attorney Benson Varghese traveled to Austin to testify before the Homeland Security and Public Safety Committee, which voted unanimously to advance the bill to the full Texas House of Representatives.

Varghese called an Athena Alert “common sense legislation” that will not result in additional taxes or financial burdens on the public.

“This proposed law is not intended to replace the AMBER Alert - an incredible law that has saved hundreds of children's lives,” Varghese said. “It extends an alert system that is already in place, allowing it to be used locally during the early stages of an investigation into the disappearance of a child.

“Because it is local, we believe more people will pay closer attention to the message when they hear it. The sooner we can get the word out, the more likely a child can be found.”

- A video of Gandy and Varghese testifying before state lawmakers can be found at <https://versusinjury.com/athena-alert/>.
- The lawsuit, as well as public information about the case and events, can be found at versusinjury.com/answers-for-athena.
- A petition in support of the Athena Alert legislation can be found at <https://chng.it/tlgLD9pkJq>.