

FROM THE PROSECUTOR'S DESK



By Sherri Bevan Walsh, Summit County Prosecutor

Summit County's Take Me Home Database Continues to Grow

It has been a year since Sheriff Drew Alexander and I — along with 25 police departments in Summit County — launched the Take Me Home program. Take Me Home is a database of individuals who would have trouble communicating in a law enforcement situation. Anyone with a disability that would inhibit communication in a law enforcement situation is eligible to be put into the database. It has been a busy year, but we have made great progress.

Immediately partnering with the Greater Akron Chapter of the Autism Society of America, we have since added the Alzheimer's Association, Greater East Ohio Chapter to our list of partners. Whether these individuals are at risk of becoming lost and unable to communicate vital information such as name and address, or if they are involved in a possible criminal matter, the searchable database contains a photo, characteristics, age, and key contact information so the person can be identified as someone with a disability and quickly reunited with the caretakers.

My Office plays a support role in this endeavor, but the police departments are on the front lines, working with us to ensure coordination both internally and externally. To that end, we have formed a Take Me Home Advisory Board that supports coordination among the departments, as we work to ensure that the database is fully operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Currently, the database is maintained and housed at the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's radio room operators have been fully trained on accepting 9-1-1 calls from parents or loved ones who are reporting a missing per-

son who is registered in the Take Me Home system, or calls from police who may have found someone wandering and want to check if they are in the database. Fortunately, we have not yet had to use the database, which now contains approximately 470 seniors, adults, and children with communication or cognitive disabilities. The database is currently only accessible law enforcement by calling the Sheriff's Office and requesting that the database be searched. The Sheriff's Office is working with each individual department to determine the best way to share search information in an emergency, much as they currently do for an Amber Alert.

One challenging aspect of the program is getting pictures and information into the database. In September, I hired a part-time Outreach Coordinator to work with the schools, senior groups, assisted living homes, and other organizations to provide registration information to parents and caretakers about registering individuals in the program. After sending information out, my Outreach Coordinator schedules a time to collect the registration information and take registrant's pictures. The police departments have also offered their help in getting photos. We have found this method to be the

most efficient way to ensure everyone has the opportunity to register.

While our hope is that someday the database becomes available to all Ohioans, for now it is a free service we offer residents of Summit County. I am proud to be a part of this program and greatly appreciate the support of our law enforcement community in offering it. For more information on Take Me Home, please contact Leslie Knoblauch at (330) 643-8741.

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