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March 30, 2016

The Honorable Charles Schumer
U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thom Tillis
U.S. Senate
185 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley
U.S. Senate
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Schumer, Grassley, and Tillis:

On behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a non-profit professional organization of more than 64,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults, I write to express our support for *Kevin and Avonte's Law of 2016* (S.2614).

It is estimated that nearly one half of children with autism will wander or elope.¹ Of children who wander or elope, nearly one third are considered non-verbal, making it extraordinarily difficult for law enforcement or first responders to call out to the child, or for the child to provide necessary information to anyone they encounter.² In many cases, even verbal autistic children may not respond when being called, and can hide or conceal themselves in small spaces. Children with special needs who wander also have an unusually high mortality rate.³ It is for these reasons that the AAP supports crucial, potentially life-saving grants for tracking technologies for these children. These devices could make all the difference in finding children with special needs who wander.

Missing children with special needs also present unique and difficult challenges for law enforcement personnel, families, search teams, schools, and communities.⁴ Children with autism exhibit social and cognitive impairments, communication difficulties, and repetitive behaviors—all of which must be handled with care by any parties to the missing child. This bill would provide grants to State and local law enforcement or public safety agencies and nonprofit organizations to assist in planning, designing, or operating locally based, proactive programs to prevent wandering and locate missing children. These programs will be able to provide prevention and response information, education and training to a wide range of individuals including law enforcement, first responders, school personnel, clinicians, families, staff, guardians, community members, and the general public. The AAP is very supportive of this community-based approach to protecting and locating children with special needs who may wander.

The AAP is also pleased that the bill calls on the Attorney General in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish standards and best practices for the use of tracking devices. It is of great importance that any technology used to track children with special needs is used effectively, and in a way that does not violate the civil rights and liberties of the child.

The AAP appreciates your commitment addressing the issue of wandering among children with special needs, and to enhancing their safety by empowering their communities through this grant program. If the AAP can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Patrick Johnson in our Washington, D.C. office at 202/347-8600 or pjohnson@aap.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Benard P. Dreyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Benard P. Dreyer, MD, FAAP
President

BPD/arp

¹ Anderson, C., Law, J. K., Daniels, A., Rice, C., Mandell, D. S., Hagopian, L., et al. Occurrence and Family Impact of Elopement in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *PEDIATRICS*, 130, 870-877. Retrieved July 18, 2014, from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/130/5/870.full.pdf+html>.

² Ibid.

³ Mouridsen SE., Bronnum-Hansen, H., Rich, B., Isager, T. Mortality and Causes of Death in Autism Spectrum Disorder: An Update. *Autism*, 12: (4), 403-414.

⁴ Missing Children with Special Needs. *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children*. Retrieved July 18, 2014, from http://www.missingkids.com/en_US/publications/SpecialNeeds_Addendum.pdf.