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GOVERNOR ABBOTT SIGNS 'ATHENA ALERT' INTO LAW

AUSTIN – Gov. Greg Abbott signed the “Athena Alert” bill into law on Tuesday, allowing law enforcement to quickly issue a regional alert when a child goes missing without confirmation of an abduction.

The law – named in honor of slain 7-year-old Athena Strand - takes effect immediately.

“I would like to thank Governor Abbott and Texas lawmakers for expediting the Athena Alert and for everyone who supported this life-saving legislation,” said Athena’s mother, Maitlyn Gandy. “It has been six months since Athena was killed and every day has been an indescribable struggle. It gives me comfort to know that Athena’s legacy will live on and help save the lives of other Texas children.”

The Athena Alert is similar to an AMBER alert, except it allows law enforcement to quickly activate an alert in a localized area – within a 100-mile radius and to adjacent counties – where a child goes missing without

verification of an abduction. It essentially closes the gap between the time a child vanishes, and a statewide AMBER Alert may be issued.



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.

In March, Rep. Lynn Stucky, who represents Wise County as part of District 64, filed House Bill 3556 - the Athena Alert - 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 April, Gandy and attorney Benson Varghese traveled to Austin to testify about the Athena Alert before the Homeland Security and Public Safety Committee. The bill was quickly advanced and sailed, unopposed, through both the House and the Senate. More than 44,000 people also signed a petition in support of the law.

On Tuesday, Varghese praised Gandy for her strength and resilience in fighting for such important legislation in the wake of her daughter's murder.

"In her darkest hour, as she mourned the loss of Athena, Maitlyn Gandy turned her grief into action - formulating legislation that has now become law and will help prevent other parents from experiencing her pain," Varghese said. "Thanks to Representative Stucky, his team, and Governor Abbott, the immediate and localized Athena Alert will save children's lives."

- 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.
- The petition in support of the Athena Alert legislation can be found at <https://chnng.it/tjgLD9pkJq>.