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**Michigan House of Representatives Judiciary Committee**  
**RE: House Bills 4159-60 of 2020**

**October 18, 2021**

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Autism Alliance of Michigan Support for House Bills 4159-60

Chairman Filler and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for considering our testimony in support of House Bills 4159-60. The Autism Alliance of Michigan, in conjunction with a number of other behavioral health and disability rights organizations around the state see an unacceptable number of vulnerable adult abuse cases.

The type of abuse on vulnerable adults can take many forms. The rise of digital communication however, has brought new and constantly changing threats to vulnerable adults. These threats allow for persons with criminal intent to execute criminal behavior in the digital world that are currently not recognized as crimes.

Complicating this increasing digital threat is the positive opportunities that new and expanded digital communication provides to the disabled community. The same tools that are allowing disabled adults to have more positive human connections are also opening the doors to criminals who aim to exploit the vulnerabilities of the disabled community. Unfortunately, Michigan law is not clear on the illegality and punishment of digital sexual coercion and force on vulnerable persons.

One of the biggest concerns for families of persons with disabilities is the protection of their disabled family member(s). Whether the family has a child who wanders, or a child who cannot hear, an adult who cannot see or an adult who is developmentally disabled – their fear is that someone will recognize their loved one's disability as an opportunity. And unfortunately, this fear is often reality. Vulnerable persons are much more likely to be victims of sex crimes than those without disabilities. And that threat is growing. Violent victimization of vulnerable adults has increased by over 50% since 2009.

House Bills 4159 and 4160 will establish that coercion, force and threatening a vulnerable adult into providing sexually explicit visual material as a misdemeanor in the State of Michigan. Thank you for your consideration to support of House Bills 4159 and 4160.

Sincerely,  
Colleen Allen  
President and CEO, Autism Alliance of  
Michigan