
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 538 Session of
2013

INTRODUCED BY BIZZARRO, RAVENSTAHL, COHEN, LUCAS, SNYDER, KOTIK, BURNS, NEILSON, CALTAGIRONE, KILLION, ROZZI, SCHLOSSBERG, MICOZZIE, MIRABITO, MILLARD, DAVIS, BROWNLEE, READSHAW, VEREB, BENNINGHOFF, LONGIETTI, HEFFLEY, SONNEY, KORTZ, MILNE, MAHONEY, KINSEY, KAVULICH, GINGRICH, FARINA, PETRI, EVERETT, MAJOR, YOUNGBLOOD, D. COSTA, MARSICO, DeLUCA, FLECK, GOODMAN, FABRIZIO, SCHLEGEL CULVER, MURT, KIRKLAND, MCNEILL, MOLCHANY, ROCK, SABATINA, WATSON, MCCARTER AND HARKINS, NOVEMBER 6, 2013

INTRODUCED AS NONCONTROVERSIAL RESOLUTION UNDER RULE 35, NOVEMBER 6, 2013

A RESOLUTION

1 Designating November 2013 as "National Epilepsy Awareness Month"
2 in Pennsylvania to inform the public about epilepsy and
3 recognizing July 27, 2014, as "Alyssa Josephine O'Neill,
4 '#ajo,' Pay-it-Forward Day" to celebrate one who had the
5 disease and died too young, but who inspired others to get
6 involved to educate the public about epilepsy.

7 WHEREAS, Epilepsy is a spectrum of more than 40 different
8 types of syndromes that cause brain seizures, which occur when
9 clusters of brain nerve cells signal abnormally, briefly
10 altering a person's consciousness, movements or actions; and

11 WHEREAS, The Epilepsy Foundation reports that the disease
12 affects people of all ages, races and countries with about 1% or
13 about 3 million of the people of the United States and about 50
14 million people worldwide having the disease; and

15 WHEREAS, Epilepsy is not contagious, but can begin at any age
16 with, according to the Epilepsy Foundation, children being

1 affected by about one in four of the more than 200,000 new
2 yearly cases of seizures, while one in three cases begin in
3 individuals who are 65 years of age or older, and the remaining
4 40% of new cases begin in individuals between 16 years of age
5 and 64 years of age; and

6 WHEREAS, While medications and other treatments help many
7 people of all ages who live with epilepsy, the Epilepsy
8 Foundation reports that more than a million people continue to
9 have seizures that can severely limit their school achievements,
10 employment prospects and participation in all of life's
11 experiences; and

12 WHEREAS, The mortality rate among people with epilepsy is two
13 to three times higher, and the risk of sudden death is 24 times
14 greater, than that of the general population; and

15 WHEREAS, This year upwards of 50,000 people will die of
16 seizures and related causes, including status epilepticus
17 (nonstop seizures), sudden unexpected death in epilepsy (SUDEP),
18 drowning and other accidents; and

19 WHEREAS, The Epilepsy Foundation annually recognizes November
20 as "Epilepsy Awareness Month" because many people continue to
21 have immense misconceptions about epilepsy; and

22 WHEREAS, According to the Epilepsy Foundation, one in three
23 adults know someone with the disorder, epilepsy is the third
24 most common neurological disorder in the United States after
25 Alzheimer's disease and stroke and its prevalence is greater
26 than that of cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's
27 disease combined; and

28 WHEREAS, Alyssa Josephine O'Neill passed away unexpectedly on
29 Wednesday, September 4, 2013, at her residence in Millcreek,
30 Erie County, after suffering an epileptic seizure, a condition

1 for which she had been diagnosed in January 2012; and

2 WHEREAS, Born in Erie on July 27, 1995, Alyssa was a daughter
3 of Jason and Sarah (Parsons) O'Neill; and

4 WHEREAS, Alyssa was a 2013 graduate of McDowell High School
5 and would soon have started her freshman year studying nursing
6 at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College; and

7 WHEREAS, While at McDowell High School, Alyssa served as a
8 member of the cheerleading squad and participated in competitive
9 cheerleading; and

10 WHEREAS, Alyssa also gave her time to build awareness of
11 epilepsy as an ambassador for the Epilepsy Project in Erie; and

12 WHEREAS, On the day before Alyssa's passing, she told her
13 mother, Sarah O'Neill, that she really wanted to try a pumpkin
14 spice latte because she had never tasted one, and her mother
15 promised her they would get one together the next day; and

16 WHEREAS, Tragically, before Alyssa and her mother could share
17 the pumpkin spice latte, a seizure occurred leading to Alyssa's
18 death; and

19 WHEREAS, Following Alyssa's funeral, her parents, Sarah and
20 Jason O'Neill, went into Starbucks to enjoy a pumpkin spice
21 latte in honor of Alyssa, and then purchased 40 pumpkin spice
22 lattes and asked Starbucks to give the lattes with "#ajo" marked
23 in purple on the cups to the next 40 customers who requested a
24 pumpkin spice latte; and

25 WHEREAS, Alyssa's parents intended that this gesture would
26 prompt people to visit Alyssa's Twitter site to learn about her,
27 her struggle with epilepsy, her efforts to inform others about
28 the disease, her untimely death at 18 years of age and about the
29 disease itself and to pay their kindness forward; and

30 WHEREAS, Starbucks matched and tripled the donation, with

1 "#ajo" marked in purple, the color for epilepsy awareness, on
2 all the cups given out that day and made a donation toward an
3 epilepsy charity in honor of Alyssa as a way to pay the kindness
4 forward; and

5 WHEREAS, Supporters made similar pay-it-forward gestures at
6 other companies in the Erie area, including Tim Hortons, Panera
7 Bread, Dairy Queen, the Ringside Restaurant and Salon H2O; and

8 WHEREAS, Donations were also made to epilepsy charities in
9 remembrance of Alyssa; and

10 WHEREAS, The awareness campaign increased with a supporter
11 starting an "AJO Forever in our Hearts" page on Facebook about
12 Alyssa and the epilepsy awareness effort, which recently
13 attracted thousands of "likes"; and

14 WHEREAS, Instagram posted thousands of photos with the #ajo
15 hashtag, while Twitter has logged thousands of tweets with the
16 hashtag to promote Alyssa's Twitter page and epilepsy awareness;
17 and

18 WHEREAS, Awareness efforts started after the tragic death of
19 Alyssa Josephine O'Neill through the "#ajo" pay-it-forward
20 effort, her Twitter and Facebook pages and elsewhere in social
21 media have informed the public of the problems of epilepsy, how
22 to respond to it and what families and the general public can do
23 to help protect the lives of those who live with epilepsy and
24 have led people to learn more about epilepsy through the
25 materials provided by the Epilepsy Foundation and the Epilepsy
26 Project of Erie; therefore be it

27 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives designate the
28 month of November 2013 as "National Epilepsy Awareness Month" in
29 Pennsylvania and urge all residents to obtain information about
30 epilepsy to end any stigma about the disease that can cause

1 discrimination in education, employment and social acceptance
2 and to assist those affected by the disease, particularly by
3 knowing the proper first aid to provide to a person having a
4 seizure; and be it further

5 RESOLVED, That the House recognize the day of July 27, 2014,
6 as "Alyssa Josephine O'Neill, '#ajo,' Pay-it-Forward Day" in
7 Pennsylvania to honor the spirit of Alyssa Josephine O'Neill and
8 the efforts she made and those made on her behalf to help those
9 who also cope with epilepsy, to inform others on how to assist
10 those with the disease and to set an example of how to continue
11 despite difficulties with the disease; and be it further

12 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives salute all the
13 "#ajo" pay-it-forward efforts and the methods of using social
14 media to share information about epilepsy to help save the lives
15 of those affected by the disease and inform the general public
16 about epilepsy; and be it further

17 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives urge its members
18 and residents of this Commonwealth interested in joining in the
19 awareness effort about epilepsy on social media and elsewhere to
20 do so in November, on July 27, 2014, or any time to pay-it-
21 forward by spreading information about epilepsy through the
22 various channels available to them.