



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HOUSE BILL 420

**STATE AND LOCAL PARKS – PLAY AREA ACCESSIBILITY – COMMUNICATION BOARDS
SUPPORT**

GOOD AFTERNOON CHAIR FELDMAN, VICE CHAIR KAGAN, AND ESTEEMED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE. FOR THE RECORD I AM DELEGATE MARY LEHMAN ASKING FOR YOUR FAVORABLE CONSIDERATION OF HB 420.

HB 420 REQUIRES THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES TO CREATE A THREE- YEAR PILOT GRANT PROGRAM, CALLED THE MARYLAND RECREATION COMMUNICATION BOARDS PILOT PROGRAM, AND ALLOCATE UP TO \$100,000 OF STATE-WIDE PROGRAM OPEN SPACE FUNDS TO THE PROGRAM EACH FISCAL YEAR. THE BILL REQUIRES THE DEPARTMENT, SUBJECT TO THE AVAILABILITY OF FUNDING UNDER THE PROGRAM, TO CONSTRUCT A COMMUNICATION BOARD IN EACH NEWLY CONSTRUCTED PLAY AREA UNDER ITS JURISDICTION, AND REQUIRES EACH LOCAL GOVERNING BODY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF PLAY AREAS THAT RECEIVES A GRANT FROM THE PROGRAM TO DO SO AS WELL. THE BILL GIVES LOCALITIES THE OPTION OF INSTALLING COMMUNICATION BOARDS IN ALREADY-EXISTING PLAY AREAS UNDERGOING ALTERATIONS.

COMMUNICATION BOARDS ARE PERMANENT STRUCTURES THAT DISPLAY PHOTOS, SYMBOLS, OR ILLUSTRATIONS WITH WORDS AND BRAILLE TO SUPPLEMENT OR REPLACE SPOKEN LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATION. THE BOARDS ARE DESIGNED TO ALLOW NON-VERBAL PEOPLE, OR PEOPLE WITH LIMITED LANGUAGE ABILITIES, TO POINT TO IMAGES TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES.

FOR EXAMPLE, A SIGN BOARD CAN DISPLAY A PICTURE OF A SAD OR SMILEY FACE TO HELP INDIVIDUALS COMMUNICATE WHAT THEY ARE FEELING, OR IT CAN DISPLAY A PICTURE OF A TOILET OR WATER SO INDIVIDUALS CAN COMMUNICATE BASIC NEEDS.

THE GRANT WILL COVER THE COSTS OF BOARDS, AS WELL AS THE COSTS OF INSTALLING THEM. THE FUNDS PROVIDE UP TO \$3,000 PER COMMUNICATION BOARD SO THAT LOCALITIES HAVE MORE FLEXIBILITY WITH WHAT PHOTOS AND SYMBOLS THEY CAN INCLUDE ON THEIR BOARDS AND CAN MEET WITH LOCAL ADVOCACY GROUPS TO ENSURE THEIR BOARDS BEST FIT THEIR COMMUNITY'S NEEDS.

RESEARCHAUTISM.ORG CHARACTERIZES THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION BOARDS AS FOLLOWS: "BY OFFERING IMAGES AS AN ALTERNATIVE FOR SPOKEN LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION BOARDS ARE MORE INCLUSIVE OF THOSE WHO MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO VERBALIZE THEIR THOUGHTS AND CAN HELP OTHERS UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS AND THOUGHTS OF NONSPEAKING OR MINIMALLY SPEAKING INDIVIDUALS."¹

SPECIFICALLY, THESE BOARDS IN A PUBLIC PLAY AREA SETTING CAN HELP NON-VERBAL CHILDREN AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES COMMUNICATE WITH CAREGIVERS, PARENTS, AND PEERS. AFFECTED DISABILITIES INCLUDE AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER, SPEECH APRAXIA, DEAFNESS, BLINDNESS, AND PEOPLE WITH LEARNING OR INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES. THE BOARDS CAN ALSO HELP INDIVIDUALS WITH LANGUAGE BARRIERS.

REGARDLESS OF AGE OR DISABILITY STATUS, PEOPLE SHOULD BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE THEIR BASIC NEEDS TO OTHERS. MANDATING COMMUNICATION BOARDS IN PUBLIC PLAY AREAS ACROSS MARYLAND IS AN IMPORTANT STEP TOWARD BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE MARYLAND.

THANK YOU AND I URGE YOUR FAVORABLE REPORT.

¹ <https://researchautism.org/oracle-newsletter/what-are-communication-boards/>.