

MML-HB 420 -FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Angelica Bailey Thupari

Position: FAV



Maryland Municipal League
The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

March 20, 2024

Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

Bill: HB 420 – State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility – Recreation
Communication Boards Pilot Program

Position: Favorable as Amended

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League supports the amended version of House Bill 420, which establishes a Maryland Recreation Communication Boards Pilot Program, administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

As originally drafted, this bill pulled revenues from Program Open Space (POS) to fund the purchase and installation of “communication boards” in play areas and State and local parks. Local governments rely heavily on POS for recreation and open space development, but the fund is limited. Many applicants are denied or do not receive the full funding they requested. Allocating POS revenues to fund communication boards would divert funding opportunities for other valuable and viable projects. However, amending the bill to create a Pilot Program funded by the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund supports the intent of the legislation without diluting POS.

For these reasons, the League respectfully requests a favorable report on the current draft of House Bill 420.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Theresa Kuhns

Angelica Bailey Thupari, Esq.

Bill Jorch

Justin Fiore

Chief Executive Officer

Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs

Director, Public Policy & Research

Deputy Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs

The Arc_Fav Testimony_HB420.pdf

Uploaded by: Jonathon Rondeau

Position: FAV



March 19, 2024

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
The Honorable Brian Feldman
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: House Bill 420: State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility -
Communication Boards**

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

I am writing to you on behalf of The Arc Central Chesapeake Region in SUPPORT of HB420: State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility - Communication Boards.

The Arc Central Chesapeake Region (The Arc) serves over 3,000 children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families in Anne Arundel County and Maryland's Eastern Shore. The Arc's mission is to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live the lives they choose by creating opportunities, promoting respect and equity, and providing access to services.

At The Arc, our Vice President of Engagement, Greg Snyder, served on the Maryland Developmental Disability Council Inclusive Playground Advisory Group. The workgroup's focus was on developing a framework for promoting inclusive playgrounds throughout Maryland. The workgroup found that, "An inclusive playground should have ramps that lead to an element a person with a disability can play with. This could be a sensory board, a slide, or a communication board."

Accessibility is important in creating access and opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our communities. With the passage of this bill, we are making progress on building inclusive communities for the children, youth, and families with intellectual and developmental disabilities. By adding communication boards to parks throughout the state, we are creating parks that are as accessible as possible for as many people as possible.

The unfortunate reality is that there aren't many accessible playgrounds in Maryland – but every child deserves to play and connect at their playground, regardless of their abilities; HB 420 will ensure that we can achieve this goal in Maryland. For these reasons, The Arc strongly supports this important legislation and urges the Committee for a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jonathon Rondeau". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jonathon Rondeau
President & CEO

EACtestimonyHB420-Senate.pdf

Uploaded by: Leslie Margolis

Position: FAV

**Education Advocacy Coalition
for Students with Disabilities**

SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

**HOUSE BILL 420: EDUCATION—STATE AND LOCAL PARKS—PLAY AREA ACCESSIBILITY—
COMMUNICATION BOARDS**

MARCH 20, 2024

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC), a coalition of more than 40 organizations and individuals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland, submits this testimony in support of House Bill 420, which would require the governing body responsible for constructing play areas to construct a communication board in each newly constructed play area under its jurisdiction. The governing body can build a communication board in an existing play area under its jurisdiction when making alterations to the play area.

Communication boards, defined in House Bill 420 as devices that display photos, symbols, or illustrations to enable individuals with limited language skills to express themselves, can provide much-needed accessibility to children with disabilities, empowering them to relay their wishes effectively and independently. Although physical access to playgrounds remains an issue for many children and is a separate issue of concern for EAC members, we also recognize that once on a playground, children with disabilities often are deprived of the ability to express choices, such as what game a group of children should play during recess. Installation of communication boards will be a helpful step towards furthering meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities by giving them language support to participate with their peers without disabilities. It is essential that these boards be accessible to all children; for this reason, we are pleased that any communication boards installed on playgrounds must also include nonvisual access and must be installed at a height that makes them accessible to all children. We trust that implementation of House Bill 420 would be in accord with best practices, including guidance available from organizations that have been working on playground communication board and accessibility issues.

For these reasons, the EAC supports House Bill 420. For more information, please contact Leslie Seid Margolis, Co-Chairperson, at 443-692-2505 or at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org.

Respectfully submitted,

Selene Almazan, Selene Almazan Law, LLC

Rene Averitt-Sanzone, The Parents' Place of Maryland

Linda Barton, MSED, Education Consultant

Beth Benevides, Autism Society of Maryland, Co-Chairperson

Melanie Carlos, xMinds (Partnership for Extraordinary Minds)

Stephanie Carr, S.L. Carr Education Consultants
Mallory Legg, Tyler Cochran, Maureen van Stone, Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute
Rich Ceruolo, Parent
Michelle Davis, ABCs for Life Success
Jennifer Engel Fisher, Weinfeld Education Group
Lisa Frank, Special Kids Company
Christine Green and Ashley Tauer, Maryland Coalition of Families
Beth Ann Hancock, Charting the Course, LLC
Kalman Hettleman, Independent Advocate
Nicole Joseph, Esq., and Kate Raab, Esq., Law Offices of Nicole Joseph
Rachel London, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council
Rosemary Kitzinger and Marjorie Guldán, Bright Futures, LLC
Leslie Seid Margolis, Disability Rights Maryland
Ellen O'Neill, Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center
Ronza Othman, National Federation of the Blind of Maryland/Maryland Organization of Parents
of Blind Children
Camila Reynolds-Dominguez, FreeState Justice
Jaime Seaton, BGS Law, LLC
Kelly Spanoghe, Education Consultant
Ronnetta Stanley, M.Ed., Loud Voices Together
Wayne Steedman, Steedman Law Group, LLC
Guy Stephens, Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint
Jessica Williams, Education Due Process Solutions, LLC
Winifred Winston, Decoding Dyslexia Maryland
Liz Zogby, Maryland Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition

Additionally, the Maryland Education Coalition joins this testimony.

2024 NAPNAP HB420 LOS .pdf

Uploaded by: Lindsay Ward

Position: FAV

2/11/24

Maryland Senate
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Honorable Chair, Vice-Chair and Members of the Committee:

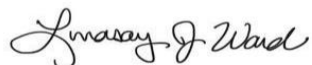
On behalf of the pediatric nurse practitioners (PNPs) and fellow pediatric-focused advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) of the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP) Chesapeake Chapter, I am writing to express our **support of HB420 State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility - Communication Boards.**

This bill would require the Department of Natural Resources and local governing bodies to construct communication boards in certain newly constructed public play areas that displays photos, symbols, or illustrations to enable individuals with limited language skills to communicate. This will allow children with disabilities to communicate some of their wants and needs and further inclusion of children with disabilities

For these reasons the Maryland Chesapeake Chapter of NAPNAP extends their support to **HB420 State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility - Communication Boards and requests a favorable.**

The pediatric advanced practice nurses of your state are grateful to you for your attention to these crucial issues. The Chesapeake Chapter of the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners membership includes over 200 primary and acute care pediatric nurse practitioners who are committed to improving the health and advocating for Maryland's pediatric patients. If we can be of any further assistance, or if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Chesapeake Chapter President, Lindsay J. Ward at 410-507-3642 or at mdchesnapnapleg@outlook.com.

Sincerely,



Lindsay J. Ward MS, BSN, CPNP-PC, IBCLC
Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner- Pediatric Primary Care
International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP)
Chesapeake Chapter President

Evgenia Ogordova

Evgenia Ogordova-DNP



National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP)
Chesapeake Chapter Legislative Chair

HB420 LEHMAN WRITTEN TESTIMONY SENATE.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Lehman

Position: FAV



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/>.

HB420_DDCouncil The Arc_FAV.EEE.pdf

Uploaded by: Rachel London

Position: FAV



Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE · IMPROVING LIVES



**Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
HB 420: State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility -
Recreation Communication Boards Pilot Program**

March 20, 2024

Position: Support

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (Council) creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide advocacy organization dedicated to the rights and quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Both organizations believe people with and without disabilities in Maryland can and should live, learn, work, and play together.

WHAT does this legislation do?

- Creates the Maryland Recreation Communication Boards Pilot Program in the Department of Natural Resources.
- Allows local governing boards to apply for a grant to cover the costs to build a communication board when constructing a new playground or changing an existing playground.

WHY is this legislation important?

- **Communication boards promote accessibility.** Communication boards allow people with limited language to express their needs and wants by using images and symbols that represent words and ideas. For example, if a child with wanted to play on the slide, they could point to a symbol for play and a picture of a slide.
- **Communication boards are inclusive playground features.** Communication boards, especially when paired with other inclusive playground features, encourage a sense of community for children and adults. The Council collaborated with the Maryland Department of Disabilities to create a framework to support inclusive playgrounds across the state¹.
- **Communication boards benefit everyone.** Communication boards can be great tools to help children or adults with limited verbal English language skills to express themselves. For both people with disabilities and people for whom English is not their first language, communication boards help promote inclusive play and interaction with friends and family.

Communication boards are one of many actions that can move our parks towards being inclusive for all Marylanders with disabilities, therefore the DD Council and The Arc Maryland support HB 420.

Contact: Rachel London, Executive Director, Maryland DD Council: RLondon@md-council.org
Ande Kolp, Executive Director, The Arc Maryland: AKolp@thearcmd.org

¹www.md-council.org/inclusiveplayground-framework

HB 420 Oral Statement.pdf

Uploaded by: Alita-Geri Carter

Position: FWA



3/19/2024

HB 420
Letter of Support

I am Alita-Geri Carter, the Chief Consultant and Founder of Qualequity Access, LLC, a nonpracticing pediatric nurse practitioner and the mother of two medically complex children with invisible disabilities. My older child has multiple diagnoses that have impacted/impact her ability to communicate. My husband and I also had a speech diagnosis that negatively impacted our childhoods.

I am here today to support HB 420 (Education – Playground Accessibility – Communication Boards). I support this bill for the following reasons:

- According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, in 2012 approximately 1 in every 12 children ages 3-17 had a diagnosis that was related to voice, speech, language, or swallowing in the preceding 12 months. Of the children with the diagnoses, over one-third had multiple diagnoses¹.
- Contemporary Pediatrics a peer-reviewed scholarly journal reports that there was an 110% for children ages 0 to 12 when compared to pre-pandemic (Fitch, 2023).
- Communication boards help children with communication challenges to communicate with their peers, their teachers, and other adults. Healthline states, “These boards may increase autonomy by allowing users to make decisions about their own lives, as it allows them to communicate their needs (toileting, if they need to see a nurse because they feel sick or hurt, if someone is being mean to them, etc.) to others more effectively”².
- Differently abled Children may have a different experience of going to School or playing outside. When our children leave our homes, their chances of being understood or communicating effectively may substantially decrease. This presents a challenging situation for them, their peers and their teachers, camp counselors, childcare providers, and the list goes on for people who may not understand them or be able to communicate with them.

Their peers may not play with them on the playground, which was our older child’s experience. She has a voice, speech, and communication disorder. The adults acting as childcare providers may not be the child’s primary childcare provider when away from their family at a camp or participating in a community event, which can be frightening and anxiety-provoking to any child with communication challenges or who is pre-verbal.

Our daughter had multiple experiences with her babysitter in Bowie, MD, where she was not understood, and also in summer camps, and this led to her being emotionally distressed during



and after returning from playgrounds from several circumstances that could have been avoided if she had been able to communicate what she needed.

- Children with communication challenges need the ability and the opportunity to socialize and play with their peers as much as their counterparts do but this need is often overlooked. There can be a lack of responsiveness to the situation. Such negative experiences can negatively impact a child's self-esteem, ability to trust, dignity, and mental health.

It is for the previously mentioned reasons that I ask that House Bill 420 receive your support today. Accessibility and inclusion should not be an afterthought when it comes to community planning. Our children matter and they deserve the opportunity to exist in meaningful ways outside of their homes. This could be one of many ways in which the state of Maryland sets the example by using the power of the pen to increase accessibility. Thank you.

Graciously,
Alita-Geri Carter, MSN, RN, CPNP-PC
Chief Consultant and Founder of the Qualequity Access, LLC.
Salisbury University DNP Candidate Spring 2026
Bowie State University Alumna
University of Maryland Graduate School of Nursing Alumna

References:

Fitch, J. F. (2023, March 23). Pediatric speech disorder diagnoses more than doubled amid COVID-19 pandemic. *Contemporary Pediatrics*.
<https://www.contemporarypediatrics.com/view/pediatric-speech-disorder-diagnoses-more-than-doubled-amid-covid-19-pandemic>

Quick Statistics About Voice, Speech, Language. (2016, May 19). National Institutes of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.
<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/quick-statistics-voice-speech-language>

Stanborough, R. M. J. (2020, July 20). What Is a Communication Board and How Does It Help? Healthline. <https://www.healthline.com/health/communication-board>