



Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE · IMPROVING LIVES



House Environment and Transportation Committee
HB 420: State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility - Communication Boards
February 14, 2024
Position: Support with sponsor amendments

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?

- This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources or local governing boards to include a communication board when constructing a new playground.
- This bill also allows the Department of Natural Resources or local governing boards to build communication boards when making changes to existing playgrounds.

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.

For these reasons, we particularly support the amendment to the definition of a communication board:
"COMMUNICATION BOARD" MEANS A DEVICE THAT DISPLAYS PHOTOS, SYMBOLS, OR ILLUSTRATIONS **WITH WORDS AND BRAILLE TO SUPPLEMENT OR PLACE SPOKEN LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATION.**
~~ENABLE INDIVIDUALS WITH LIMITED LANGUAGE SKILLS TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES AND COMMUNICATE.~~

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 with the sponsor amendments.

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