

**2024 NAPNAP HB420 LOS .pdf**

Uploaded by: Lindsay Ward

Position: FAV



2/11/24

Maryland House of Representatives  
Environment and Transportation Committee  
Room 251  
House Office 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 OR unfavorable report.**

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](mailto: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

# **HB\_420\_FAV\_LateTestimony\_TheArcCentralChesapeakeRe**

Uploaded by: Luke P. Pinton

Position: FAV



February 14, 2024

House Environment and Transportation Committee  
The Honorable Marc Korman  
Room 121  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the House Environment and Transportation  
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

# **HB 420 Lehman Testimony .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 KORMAN, VICE CHAIR BOYCE, AND ESTEEMED ENT COLLEAGUES. FOR THE RECORD I AM DELEGATE MARY LEHMAN ASKING FOR YOUR FAVORABLE CONSIDERATION OF HB 420.

HB 420 REQUIRES LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO INSTALL COMMUNICATION BOARDS IN ALL NEWLY CONSTRUCTED PLAY AREAS LOCATED WITHIN A PUBLIC PARK OR RECREATION AREA. 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 TO SUPPLEMENT OR REPLACE SPOKEN LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATION. THEY ARE DESIGNED TO SUPPORT NON-VERBAL PEOPLE OR PEOPLE WITH LIMITED LANGUAGE ABILITY, ALLOWING THEM 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.



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.”<sup>1</sup>

SPECIFICALLY, THESE BOARDS IN A PLAYGROUND SETTING CAN HELP NON-VERBAL CHILDREN OR PERSONS WITH OTHER DISABILITIES COMMUNICATE WITH CAREGIVERS, PARENTS, AND PEERS. AFFECTED DISABILITIES INCLUDE AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER, SPEECH APRAXIA, DEAFNESS, BLINDNESS, AND PEOPLE WITH LEARNING OR INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES.

## **AMENDMENTS**

I HAVE FRIENDLY AMENDMENTS TO THE BILL:

1. THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES WILL CREATE A GRANT PROGRAM AND ALLOCATE \$100,000 OF STATE-WIDE PROGRAM OPEN SPACE FUNDS TO THE PROGRAM EVERY FISCAL YEAR. THE GRANT WILL COVER THE COSTS OF THE BOARDS, AS WELL AS THE COSTS OF INSTALLING THEM.
2. THE AMENDMENT CHANGES THE FUNDING SOURCE FROM LOCAL POS FUNDING TO STATE POS FUNDING.
3. THE AMENDMENT CHANGES THE DEFINITION OF COMMUNICATION BOARDS BY ADDING BRAILLE SO THAT THE BOARDS ARE MORE INCLUSIVE AND MIRROR THE SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION BOARDS INSTALLED IN HOWARD COUNTY PARKS. THE FUNDS PROVIDE UP TO \$5,000 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.

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


REGARDLESS OF AGE OR DISABILITY STATUS, PEOPLE SHOULD BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE THEIR BASIC NEEDS TO OTHERS. MANDATING COMMUNICATION BOARDS AT PUBLIC PLAY AREAS ACROSS MARYLAND IS AN IMPORTANT STEP TOWARD FULFILLING A NEED FOR NON-VERBAL PEOPLE AND OTHERS WHOSE DISABILITIES LIMIT THEIR VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS. DOING SO WILL HELP US BUILD A MORE INCLUSIVE MARYLAND.

THANK YOU AND I URGE YOUR FAVORABLE REPORT.



# Playground Communication Board

Explore to learn more → 

	am is are	can	will	do	have	what?	where?	who?	not	more
you	we	want	like	need	get	when?	why?	how?	different	all done
he	she	catch	climb	come	drink	over	in	out	good	bad
they	they	eat	give	go	help	under	up	down	okay	tired
it	hurt	jump	kick	look	make	play	on	off	happy	sad
pull	push	run	say	see	stop	take	throw	turn	walk	wheel
ball	bathroom	field	friend	game	problem	slide	structure	swing	hi	bye

Do you want to play?  
 I want to play!  
 This is fun!  
 Let's talk.

# **HB420 Playground Communication Board AMENDMENTS.pd**

Uploaded by: Mary Lehman

Position: FAV



HB0420/163422/1

AMENDMENTS  
PREPARED  
BY THE  
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE  
SERVICES

12 FEB 24  
11:41:37

BY: Delegate Lehman

(To be offered in the Environment and Transportation Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO HOUSE BILL 420

(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, in line 3, after “and” insert “certain”; in line 7, after the semicolon insert “establishing the Maryland Recreation Communication Boards Program to provide grants to local governing bodies to purchase and install communication boards;”; and in line 16, strike “5-2103” and substitute “5-2104”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 2, strike beginning with “TO” in line 12 down through “COMMUNICATE” in line 13 and substitute “WITH WORDS AND BRAILLE TO SUPPLEMENT OR REPLACE SPOKEN LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATION”; in line 18, after “(F)” insert ““PROGRAM” MEANS THE MARYLAND RECREATION COMMUNICATION BOARDS PROGRAM ESTABLISHED UNDER § 5-2104 OF THIS SUBTITLE.”

(G);

in line 26, after “(B)” insert “(1)”; strike beginning with “AND” in line 26 down through “AREAS” in line 27; and after line 28, insert:

“(2) EACH LOCAL GOVERNING BODY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF PLAY AREAS THAT RECEIVES A GRANT FROM THE PROGRAM SHALL CONSTRUCT AT LEAST ONE COMMUNICATION BOARD IN EACH NEWLY CONSTRUCTED PLAY AREA UNDER ITS JURISDICTION.”

On page 3, in line 6, strike “(A)”; and strike in their entirety lines 10 through 17, inclusive, and substitute:

“5-2104.

(A) (1) THERE IS A MARYLAND RECREATION COMMUNICATION BOARDS PROGRAM.

(2) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ADMINISTER THE PROGRAM.

(B) (1) FOR EACH FISCAL YEAR THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ALLOCATE \$100,000 OF THE STATE’S SHARE OF PROGRAM OPEN SPACE FUNDS AVAILABLE UNDER § 5-904 OF THIS TITLE TO PROVIDE GRANTS TO LOCAL GOVERNING BODIES TO PURCHASE AND INSTALL COMMUNICATION BOARDS.

(2) A LOCAL GOVERNING BODY MAY APPLY TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR A GRANT FROM THE PROGRAM.

(3) (I) SUBJECT TO SUBPARAGRAPH (II) OF THIS PARAGRAPH, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL AWARD A GRANT EQUAL TO THE COST OF PURCHASING AND INSTALLING EACH COMMUNICATION BOARD.

(II) A GRANT MAY NOT EXCEED \$5,000 FOR EACH COMMUNICATION BOARD THAT IS PURCHASED AND INSTALLED.

(C) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL PRIORITIZE THE AWARD OF GRANTS TO A LOCAL GOVERNING BODY THAT IS INSTALLING A COMMUNICATION BOARD IN A NEWLY CONSTRUCTED PLAY AREA.”

# **HB\_420\_FAV\_LateTestimony\_MelissaRosenberg**

Uploaded by: Melissa Rosenberg

Position: FAV



**State and Local Parks – Play Area Accessibility – Communication Boards  
HB0420 – In Support  
Testimony of the Autism Society of Maryland  
Melissa Rosenberg, Executive Director  
February 12, 2024**

My name is Melissa Rosenberg, Executive Director of the Autism Society of Maryland, formerly the Howard County Autism Society. I am honored to come before you this afternoon in support of HB0420 which would bring more Communication Boards to our state and local parks, increasing play area accessibility for all children.

When we talk about inclusion in our state, we want inclusion to start at the earliest stages of development – on the playground - so that Maryland’s children grow up with that expectation. Of course, we are inclusive on playgrounds. Of course, we are inclusive in the classroom. Of course, we are inclusive in universities, and in the workplace, and in the community. It is a mindset for a lifetime.

In October of 2020, the Autism Society celebrated the installation of the first of eight new Communication Boards at Waverly Elementary School in Ellicott City. The first of their kind in Maryland, they were designed to assist students who are non-speaking play more freely and inclusively on the playground with peers and without their augmentative and alternative communication devices, or AACs, in tow. The boards were a gift from our organization to the Howard County Public School System and its children. Today, they are on every elementary school playground in Howard County.

We donated similar boards for two county playgrounds – Blandair and North Centennial - in partnership with the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks. These boards also include braille in addition to visual images for greater inclusivity. Last fall we gifted interior boards for all branches of the Howard County Library and Cedar Lane School in Fulton, MD. Together with our partners at the Arc of Maryland and with support from the Hussman Foundation, we created a video that explains what the boards are and how they work. I’ve included a link to that as well as photos of existing boards in my testimony.

We happily share this because that’s what inclusion is all about. We’ve had calls from all over the state, the country and even outside of the U.S. from folks who have seen the boards on our social media or website and want to know how to bring them to their community playground.

And they do work.





Last spring I was at Laura’s Play for All Playground in Blandair Park with a local official and two young boys were by one of the boards, looking and pointing. One of them took my hand and led me to the board, showing ME how to point to the images and then to items on the playground – the slide, the swings – so that I, too, would know how to use the boards. You just can’t make these things up.

To use the communication boards, children point to pictures on the display to express their thoughts and feelings. The symbols on the board were originally taken from a communication product called TouchChat and were selected by speech-language pathologists specifically for use on playgrounds. They can be customized to include symbols that are appropriate for many settings – the playground, a library, a public pool. And they benefit those for whom English is not their first language, providing visual access for even more children.

Go to any playground where communication boards live, and you will see similar moments of connection between peers. They certainly bring awareness to AACs, increasing equity for children with learning and communication differences. By using these boards, children no longer need to carry their personal AAC devices with them on the playground, which is just awkward. Exposure to these signs for neurotypical children is just as beneficial so they can communicate with peers who use AAC systems.

One-third of individuals with Autism will be non-speaking at some point in their lives, and perhaps for a lifetime. It is not an indication of IQ, interest in having social connections, or just enjoying an afternoon on the playground.

While the Autism Society is fully in support of having boards on every playground in Maryland, we know there is a cost associated with doing so since we’ve now spent several thousand dollars on the boards, installation and video. With so many competing needs, we hope funds will be in place for new playgrounds as well as a pipeline to funding – perhaps through foundations, public fundraising, or gifts from organizations such as ours.

The Autism Society encourages your support of HB0420. With amenities like these communication boards, Maryland will serve as a model for how parks can and should be built with every member of the community in mind.

Thank you!



Howard | Montgomery | Anne Arundel



*Dedication of Boards at Blandair Park in Columbia, MD (2021)*



*Dedication of boards at Waverly Elementary School in 2020 and Howard County Public Library in 2023.*

**LINK TO YOUTUBE VIDEO:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DpKoy2bTxQ>

**LINK TO OUR WEBSITE:** <https://autismsocietymd.org/resources/ausom-resources/communication-boards-building-inclusive-playgrounds/>

**2024-HB0420-T4BL-FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Nicholas Marks

Position: FAV



HB 420:  
State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility - Communication Boards  
House Environment and Transportation Committee  
Terps For Bike Lanes – FAVORABLE

February 12, 2024

Chair Korman and Committee Members,

I am writing to express Terps for Bike Lanes' strong support for HB0420, which seeks to require the Department of Natural Resources and local governing bodies to construct communication boards in certain newly constructed public play areas. As an organization dedicated to enhancing bicycle infrastructure and fostering inclusivity in our community, we believe that this legislation aligns perfectly with our core values of sustainability, accessibility, and equity.

Our advocacy efforts extend beyond just bike lanes; we are committed to creating a more inclusive environment for all individuals, including those with limited language skills. By defining "communication board" as a device that displays photos, symbols, or illustrations to enable individuals with limited language skills to communicate, this bill promotes accessibility and ensures that public play areas are inclusive for everyone.

Research, such as the systematic review conducted by McAllister et al. (2019) and published in *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, has consistently shown the effectiveness of communication boards in enhancing communication and social interaction for individuals with developmental disabilities. The findings underscore the importance of implementing measures to support communication and inclusion in public spaces, aligning perfectly with the goals of HB0420.

Terps for Bike Lanes fully supports HB0420 and its provisions to enhance accessibility and inclusivity in public play areas. We believe that investing in communication boards will not only benefit individuals with communication difficulties but also create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone in our community.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Marks

President, Terps for Bike Lanes

[terps4bikelanes@gmail.com](mailto:terps4bikelanes@gmail.com)

# **HB 420 MD Speech Language Hearing Assoc.pdf**

Uploaded by: Sarah Peters

Position: FAV



**Bill: HB 420: State and Local Parks – Play Area Accessibility – Communication Boards**

**Position: SUPPORT**

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

On behalf of the Maryland Speech Language Hearing Association (MSHA), representing speech language pathologists and audiologists across Maryland, we support HB 420. Collectively, we elevate and engage members to strive for excellence in serving those impacted by communication and related disorders through advocacy, equity, education, interprofessional collaboration, and leadership development.

House Bill 420 would require the Department of Natural Resources and local governing bodies to construct communication boards in public play areas. Communication boards facilitate safety and have a vital role in allowing all children to fully participate in play. This visible, supportive reminder of communication differences cultivates a culture of acceptance and inclusivity. Communication boards are a simple way to make it clear to families in Maryland that all children are welcomed, valued members of our community. For these reasons, the Maryland Speech Language Hearing Association supports House Bill 420.

Thank you,

Megan Miskowski, M.S., CCC-SLP

Director of Advocacy and Public Policy

Maryland Speech Language Hearing Association

Maryland Speech-Language-Hearing Association  
140B Purcellville Gateway Drive, Suite 120  
Purcellville, VA 20132  
301-304-7001  
[info@mdslha.org](mailto:info@mdslha.org)  
[www.mdslha.org](http://www.mdslha.org)

# **HB420 Communication.pdf**

Uploaded by: Sharon Maneki

Position: FAV



Subject: Support with Amendments for HB420

Date: February 14, 2024

From: National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

15 Charles Plaza, #3002, Baltimore, MD 21201

[president@nfbmd.org](mailto:president@nfbmd.org)

To: House Environment and Transportation Committee

Members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland strongly urge the Environment and Transportation Committee to support the amended version of HB420 State and Local Parks – Play Area Accessibility – Communication Boards. All children including the blind must have access to the proposed communication boards. For blind children to be included, the boards must be non-visually accessible. This term means that the boards must have tactile information in braille and raised print. The state and local governments must take the time to ensure that this is done correctly and seek the input of blind volunteers to review the communication boards before final approval. The information must be understandable, which means the raised print cannot be indented and the braille dots must be of proper size and appropriate spacing. For example, see standard below,

“This from section 3.2 of National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress specification 800.

Section 1.1 Size and spacing

1.1.1 Height

The height of braille dots shall be 0.019 +0.002/-0.001 inches and shall be uniform within any given transcription.

1.1.2 Diameter

The base diameter of braille dots shall be 0.057 +0.002/-0.001 inches.

1.1.3 Cell Spacing

Cell spacing of dots shall conform to the following requirements:

a. The distance from center to center of adjacent dots (horizontally or vertically, but not diagonally) in the same cell shall be 0.092 +0.002/-0.001 inches.

b. The distance from center to center of corresponding dots in adjacent cells shall be 0.245 +0.005/-0.001 inches.

#### 1.1.4 Line Spacing

The nominal line spacing of braille cells from center to center of nearest corresponding dots in adjacent lines shall be 0.400 inches.”

The goal of this bill is to make play areas accessible for all children. If this goal is to be achieved, governments must have proper installation and adequate funding. Please vote in favor of the amended HB420.

**HB420\_DDCouncil The Arc\_SWA.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ande Kolp

Position: FWA



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 state<sup>1</sup>.
- **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 DEVISE 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.

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

<sup>1</sup>[www.md-council.org/inclusiveplayground-framework](http://www.md-council.org/inclusiveplayground-framework)

**HB0420\_DNR\_SWA\_ENT\_2-14-24.pdf**

Uploaded by: Dylan Behler

Position: FWA



Wes Moore, Governor  
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor  
Josh Kurtz, Secretary  
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

February 14, 2024

**BILL NUMBER: House Bill 420 - First Reader**

**SHORT TITLE: State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility - Communication Boards**

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

### **EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION**

The Department of Natural Resources supports this legislation to expand play area accessibility by facilitating the development and deployment of communication boards. As defined in the legislation, these communication boards are intended to enable individuals with limited language skills to express themselves and communicate. It remains a top priority for the Department to continue to find ways to make our resources more accessible and we believe that this legislation will do just that.

The Department does offer one amendment for the Committee's consideration. As drafted, this legislation would require DNR to use Program Open Space funding for the construction of these communication boards. As referenced below the Department officers an amendment to make that an authorization, not a requirement. As drafted, the legislation would preclude the Department from utilizing any other funding source if it is available for the construction of these boards and we would appreciate the flexibility. The proposed amendments also make the same clarification for Program Open Space local as well.

### **AMENDMENT NO. 1**

On page 3, in line 6, strike "SHALL" and substitute "MAY"; in line 10, strike "SHALL" and substitute "MAY"; and

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Maryland Park Service (MPS) within the Department manages approximately 38 playgrounds around the State. MPS currently has bulletin boards near most playgrounds that already allow for the intended communication required under the bill.

### **BILL EXPLANATION**

This legislation would require the construction of communication boards in each newly constructed play area under State or local jurisdiction. As drafted, the legislation also requires the use of Program Open Space funding for said purpose.

Contact: Dylan Behler, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services  
dylan.behler@maryland.gov ♦ 410-260-8113 (office) ♦ 443-924-0891 (cell)

**EACtestimony.HB420.pdf**

Uploaded by: Leslie Margolis

Position: FWA

Education Advocacy Coalition  
for Students with Disabilities

HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

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

FEBRUARY 14, 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, 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 strongly support the amendment that would revise the definition of communication board to say: **“COMMUNICATION BOARD” MEANS A DEVICE THAT DISPLAYS PHOTOS, SYMBOLS, OR ILLUSTRATIONS WITH WORDS AND BRAILLE TO SUPPLEMENT OR REPLACE SPOKEN LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATION. TO ENABLE INDIVIDUALS WITH LIMITED LANGUAGE SKILLS TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES AND COMMUNICATE.**

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](mailto: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

Ariannwyn Carver, Mallory Finn, 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 Guldan, 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

Maria Ott, Attorney

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.

# **Signed HB 420 Written Testimony Communication Boar**

Uploaded by: Lisa Belcastro

Position: FWA



DATE: February 14, 2024

BILL: HB 420: State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility - Communication Boards

COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation

POSITION: Favorable with Amendments

Dear Chair Korman,

The Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) is pleased to submit this letter indicating our support with amendments for HB 420: State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility - Communication Boards.

Over the last two years, MDOD and the Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) have worked on an initiative to expand inclusive playgrounds throughout the state of Maryland. We recently launched an Inclusive Playground Framework and Toolkit which outlines the benefits of inclusive playgrounds and strategies for implementation.

House Bill 420 would require the Department of Natural Resources and local governing bodies to construct communication boards in newly constructed play areas and authorize the addition of communication boards to existing play areas through the use of Program Open Space funds.

Playgrounds should be welcoming for all as they foster opportunities for physical, social, and emotional learning. Installing communication boards within playgrounds creates an inclusive environment where all children, regardless of their abilities, background, or differences can play together.

While Program Open Space can play an important role in funding communication boards, MDOD recognizes there are additional funding sources available. We suggest the bill be amended to allow additional funding sources beyond Program Open Space.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter. If you have any questions please contact Lisa Belcastro, Deputy Secretary, [Lisa.Belcastro@maryland.gov](mailto:Lisa.Belcastro@maryland.gov), (443) 941-5094.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol A. Beatty".

Carol A. Beatty, Secretary

**HB0420-ET\_MACo\_OPP.pdf**

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: UNF



## House Bill 420

### *State and Local Parks - Play Area Accessibility - Communication Boards*

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Environment & Transportation Committee

Date: February 14, 2024

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 420 as drafted. This bill would mandate counties to use Program Open Space funds to install communication boards in all new parks as well as those undergoing significant renovation.

Program Open Space (POS) is the heartbeat of Maryland's recreation and conservation landscape. Enacted in the 1960s, POS is funded via the transfer tax from the sale of real estate, and for the majority of jurisdictions, represents the most significant influx of capital and operating dollars. POS funds are distributed to counties via a preset formula and are spoken for years in advance to help finance major projects. The success of POS is largely due to its empowerment of communities to develop recreation and conservation offerings that best meet their specific needs.

**For Fiscal Year 2025 the local share of POS is projected to shrink from roughly \$90 million to roughly \$30 million. This is NOT \$30 million per county, but \$30 million to be divided amongst all political subdivisions.** While some advocates state that communication boards cost roughly \$600-\$1000 each, most counties cite a price ranging from \$2500-\$5000. If enacted as-is, HB 420's unfunded mandate will further erode individual county distributions and ultimately hurt the very communities this bill is aiming to help.

While counties have significant concerns with the current language, MACo is grateful to the sponsor for developing a series of amendments which would alleviate county concerns. Specifically, the sponsor amendments create the Maryland Recreation Communication Boards Program (MRCBP) within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The MRCBP would be allocated \$100,000 each year from the state side of POS, and these funds would be used to issues grants of up to \$5000 per communication board to be installed.

With these amendments, HB 420 retains the flexibility of local POS, while providing funding for the state's mandate. MACo would like to express sincere gratitude for the sponsor's willingness to engage in dialogue and find common ground. While counties **OPPOSE** the introduced bill, they urge the Committee to favorably consider the changes suggested above.

**BaltimoreCounty\_UNF\_HB0420.pdf**

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Position: UNF



JOHN A. OLSZEWSKI, JR.  
*County Executive*

JENNIFER AIOSA  
*Director of Government Affairs*

AMANDA KONTZ CARR  
*Legislative Officer*

WILLIAM J. THORNE  
*Legislative Associate*

**BILL NO.:**           **HB 420**

**TITLE:**               State and Local Parks – Play Area Accessibility –  
                              Communication Boards

**SPONSOR:**           Delegate Lehman

**COMMITTEE:**       Environment and Transportation

**POSITION:**         **OPPOSE**

**DATE:**               February 14, 2024

Baltimore County **OPPOSES** House Bill 420 – State and Local Parks – Play Area Accessibility – Communication Boards. This legislation would not only add a requirement of “communication boards,” but mandates that local jurisdictions apply for Program Open Space funds for these boards.

Baltimore County’s Department of Recreation and Parks, alongside other parks and recreation agencies throughout the state, consistently oppose any directed use of Program Open Space funding. This legislation does not supplement or increase Program Open Space funding, so it functions as an unfunded mandate. The intention of being inclusive with all residents that want to enjoy these amenities is positive, however, the path that the legislation takes to accomplish these goals would represent a hardship for our department.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 420 from the House Environment and Transportation committee. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, Director of Government Affairs at [jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov](mailto:jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov).

# **Position Statement\_ HB 420 State and Local Parks –**

Uploaded by: Jordan BaucumColbert

Position: INFO





## **POSITION STATEMENT**

### **INFORMATIONAL**

**Bill:** HB 0420 State and Local Parks – Play Area Accessibility – Communication Boards

**Position:** Informational

**Date:** February 14, 2024

**Contact:** Debra Borden, General Counsel

Jordan Baucum Colbert, Government Affairs Liaison

Dear Chair Marc Korman and Vice Chair Regina T. Boyce,

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC or “the Commission”) offers informational written testimony on HB 0420. The Commission respectfully requests that the Environment and Transportation committee consider this information and include it in the record.

**What this Bill Does.** Requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and local governing bodies to construct communication boards in certain newly constructed public play areas. This bill also authorizes DNR and local governing bodies to construct communication boards when making alterations to certain existing public play areas. This bill also requires the construction of Communication Boards in play areas to be funded through DNR’s program open space.

**Background on Communications Boards.** A communication board helps those who have conditions like autism or brain injuries, individuals who are non-verbal, and people who have learning disabilities and/or developmental disabilities to communicate with others.

**Prince George’s County Department of Parks and Recreation.** Commission playgrounds come in all shapes and sizes from small neighborhood parks to imagination playgrounds. Providing communication boards can ease the difficulty of communicating with people with differing abilities and who speak different languages. Prince George’s County Parks and Recreation Department strives for the equitable delivery of accessible playgrounds. For instance, new and renovated playgrounds will replace equipment and surfacing, improve access, consider additional amenities for playgrounds, and will include communication boards as part of the design process. The Department has recently installed three communication boards and plans on installing 10 a year as playgrounds are renovated/replaced.

For more information on imagination playgrounds in Prince George’s County visit our website: <https://www.pgpc.com/parks-trails/park-finder?amenity=play-equipment&renttype=>

**Montgomery County Parks.** In Montgomery County, 41.7% of the population are speakers of a non-English language, which is higher than the national average (21.9%). Montgomery Parks has installed 3’x 5’ foot framed communication boards displaying over 60 photos, symbols, and illustrations to assist people with diverse language skills to express themselves. The words or phrases are in English, Spanish, and Braille. The user simply gestures to the images on the board to communicate with others. Picture communication boards have pictures on them that link to the language we use daily. These boards have words in English, Spanish, and Braille. You can use the board to create simple messages. You can point to a picture to say that word e.g. “Happy” or point to 2 or more pictures to say a simple phrase or sentence e.g. “Hungry + I + want + snack” or “I + want + slide”.

Currently, Montgomery Parks has communication boards in eight playgrounds and an additional five in planning/production. Montgomery Parks will continue to add communication boards to new and redeveloped parks, depending on cost, site considerations, and other factors.

For more information on our communications boards in Montgomery County visit our website: <https://www.mncppc.org/5139/Playground-Renovations-Replacements>