



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB1204**  
**Public and Nonpublic Schools - Student Elopement - Notice and Reporting Requirements**

Good afternoon, Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. For the record, I am Delegate Edith Patterson, sponsor of Public and Nonpublic Schools - Student Elopement - Notice and Reporting Requirements.

This legislation is inspired by the tragic death of a five-year-old boy from Charles County. The young boy was autistic and non-verbal, and he drowned after leaving a supervised area. Meeting with his parents and members of the Autism Community in Charles County brought to light a devastating reality: drowning is the leading cause of death for autistic children and adults.

Elopement occurs when an autistic student leaves a supervised area without permission. This behavior is not only dangerous but, as this young boy's story demonstrates, potentially fatal. Shockingly, his parents learned at the end of the school year, that he had eloped from school more than 700 times during the school year. Despite the frequency of these incidents, his school did not have a plan in place to notify his parents or address this high-risk behavior adequately. This lack of communication and planning underscores the urgent need for this legislation.

This legislation will require:

1. Parent Notification:
  - Public agencies will be required to notify a parent or legal guardian when a student attempts or successfully elopes from a supervised area or school campus.
2. State Reporting and Accountability:
  - The State Department of Education will develop a system to report incidents of attempted or achieved elopement and hold schools accountable for compliance with these regulations.
3. Inclusion in Individualized Plans:
  - A child's elopement behavior will be reviewed annually as part of their Individualized Education Program (IEP) and addressed in their Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). This ensures that elopement is treated with the seriousness it deserves and that tailored strategies are developed to keep students safe.

This bill represents more than a policy change—it is a life-saving measure. It ensures that parents are immediately informed when their child elopes, allowing them to take appropriate action. By

integrating elopement behavior into IEPs and BIPs, schools will be required to address these incidents with preventative measures and individualized interventions proactively.

The tragic situation in Charles County is a sobering reminder of what's at stake. We cannot allow another family to endure such a preventable tragedy. This legislation protects our most vulnerable community members and ensures that schools are equipped to respond to and mitigate the risks of elopement.

We have two amendments. First, we would like to name this bill in honor of a young boy who lost his life when he eloped – Ace Alexander – and second, removes the reference to 24-hour notice and substitutes same day. I respectfully urge you to vote favorably for together, we can make our schools safer and help protect the lives of our most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you for your consideration,

Edith Patterson  
Charles County