

Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

March 27, 2025

**HB 1204: Public and Nonpublic Schools– Student Elopement–
Notice and Reporting Requirements**

Position: Support

The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide advocacy organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the rights and quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We were started in the 1950s by parents who sought a better life for their children with developmental disabilities, and since that time, our network in Maryland has grown to several chapters of The Arc who provide direct services and supports to over 8,000 people with IDD and thousands more individuals who do not access our network's provider-supported services, but rely on The Arc for free information and referral services, advice, guidance, and advocacy support and training.

This bill requires that each time a student attempts or accomplishes an elopement (leaving a school campus without the permission of a responsible school staff member), the school must notify the student's parent or guardian on the same day as the incident. In addition, at least annually, a school or a student's individualized education program (IEP) team must review and address wandering or elopement behavior in updating the student's IEP or behavioral intervention plan. A school must develop policies and procedures to implement the bill's provisions.

The fiscal note, as revised, is now \$0. The change in law will benefit both students with and without disabilities and their families. The Arc Maryland has heard from many families who have loved ones who have wandering and elopement behaviors; many with Autism, but some with other intellectual and developmental disabilities. Some of the stories are incredible; of children managing to leave school without the school noticing and children getting a mile or more away before it is noticed they are gone. There have been children who have eloped from school, and with the assistance of trackers, have been safely returned to school by their parents. Note: while trackers, for some families, are invaluable, they do not **prevent** a child from eloping. There are behavioral interventions that may be useful to support children with wandering behaviors, **but they are only useful when we know the behavior exists**. This was not the case with young Miles M. (Charles County) whose family discovered the extent of his wandering behavior only after he wandered



The Arc Maryland
8601 Robert Fulton Drive
Suite 140
Columbia, MD 21046
T 410.571.9320
www.thearcmd.org

away from his house and was found in a body of water a short time later. Had Miles' parents been informed earlier by the school that he had eloped several times prior to this tragedy, they might have had opportunity to change the outcome of his story.

For any student who elopes, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) processes offer proactive ways of addressing elopement behavior.

Under HB 1204 notification of parents is a requirement, within 24 hours of an incident, but the notice is not required if the student has an IEP or BIP that addresses wandering or eloping behavior.

We appreciate the Sponsor for taking such an incredible interest in this issue and urge a favorable report from the committee.

Sincerely,
Ande Kolp, Executive Director
The Arc Maryland, akolp@thearcmd.org