

HB1204. EEE. The Arc Maryland. Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Ande Kolp

Position: FAV

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



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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

EAC testimonyHB1204.senate.pdf

Uploaded by: Leslie Margolis

Position: FAV

Education Advocacy Coalition

for Students with Disabilities

SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 1204

Public and Nonpublic Schools—Student Elopement—Notice and Reporting Requirements

March 27, 2025

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC) is a coalition of nearly 50 organizations and individuals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland. The EAC supports House Bill 1204, which would impose notice and reporting requirements on schools when students elope from their school buildings.

EAC members represent or work with many students whose disabilities may, for a variety of reasons, impel them to elope, sometimes with fatal consequences. Some students have disappeared for hours and been located miles from their schools; others have been found in nearby bodies of water or sometimes in their school parking lot with traffic coming and going. Many schools are located on or near busy streets. 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 the behavior. House Bill 1204 would require same-day notification to parents if their child elopes from the school.

Notice is especially important for students who have IEPs or BIPs, as elopement may signal that the IEP is not appropriate or that the strategies outlined in the BIP are not working and need to be changed. Additionally, if a child successfully leaves the school building, same-day notice to parents will enable them to take appropriate steps to ensure that their child is safe after school and during the evening.

For these reasons, the EAC supports House Bill 1204

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Respectfully submitted,

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Ande Kolp, The Arc Maryland

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Beth Nolan, MAT, Education Team Allies

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HB1204 EEE Patterson Testimony in Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Edith Patterson

Position: FWA



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