

**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 507
Public Schools – Individuals With Disabilities – Accessibility and Emergency Planning**

Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 507, introduced by Senator **Craig Zucker**, which strengthens emergency planning and accessibility protections for students with disabilities in Maryland public schools.

As a parent of a first-grade student in **Frederick County Public Schools**, this legislation is deeply personal to me. My daughter is non-speaking and has significant fine and gross motor challenges due to ataxic cerebral palsy. In an emergency situation, she cannot move quickly, communicate her needs verbally, or navigate barriers without assistance. For students like her, accessibility is not an abstract concept, it is the difference between safety and danger.

Despite her clear needs, it took more than half of the school year for her emergency evaluation and safety planning to be accurately reflected in her Individualized Education Program (IEP). During that time, I was left wondering whether her school could safely evacuate her in a crisis, whether staff understood her mobility challenges, and whether emergency plans truly accounted for students with complex disabilities.

SB507 addresses exactly these gaps. By requiring local school systems to:

- Identify accessibility issues during safety evaluations,
- Report instances when facilities become inaccessible in ways that could impede evacuation or response, and
- Use that information to strengthen emergency planning,

This bill ensures that disability inclusion is treated as a core safety issue rather than an afterthought.

Importantly, the bill balances transparency and security by keeping reports confidential while allowing legislative oversight. This approach promotes accountability while protecting school safety planning.

Emergency preparedness must work for *all* students. If a school's evacuation or lockdown procedures fail for students with disabilities, then the plan itself is incomplete. SB507 recognizes that true school safety requires proactive planning for accessibility.

I respectfully urge the Committee to give SB507 a favorable report and help ensure that every student in Maryland, regardless of ability, is protected in times of emergency.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Shopland

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Frederick County Council District 2 Candidate (By Authority: Friends of Jamie Shopland,
Elizabeth Heaney, Treasurer)