



**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

*Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Gloria Brown Burnett, Interim Secretary*

February 24, 2026

The Honorable J. Sandy Bartlett, Chair  
House Judiciary Committee  
100 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON HB 634 - POLICE TRAINING - AUTISM AND DEMENTIA (LEAD ACT OF 2026) - POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Bartlett and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report for House Bill 634 (HB 634).


With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS provides preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities to assist Marylanders in reaching their full potential. Our Social Services Administration (SSA) oversees the Office of Adult Services (OAS) which is affected by HB 634. This legislation would direct the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to require entrance-level and in-service police training to include specific training focused on individuals with dementia and autism. Current practice lacks the awareness necessary to ensure non-physical deescalation, sensory-aware communication, and specialized search-and-rescue protocols are followed. With this bill, officers will be trained to effectively respond to individuals with dementia and autism, allowing law enforcement to reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes.

The mission of DHS is to protect vulnerable children and adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Individuals with dementia and autism are often prone to "elopement" (wandering) and sensory-driven panic which can be exacerbated by a responding law enforcement. Training for law enforcement officers should be more inclusive because these populations have specific behavior and emotional needs.

There are approximately [98,200](#) people between the ages of 18 and 64 on the autism spectrum, and approximately [110,000](#) Marylanders over the age of 65 with dementia. In their testimony, [Laila's Gift](#), a nonprofit organization championing this bill, highlights the importance of a caregiver-centered approach in addressing elopement risks from early childhood through older adulthood for this large and growing population of Marylanders.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide favorable testimony to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. If you require additional information, please contact Justin Hayes, Acting Director of Government Affairs, at [justin.hayes1@maryland.gov](mailto:justin.hayes1@maryland.gov).

In service,



Gloria Brown Burnett  
Interim Secretary