



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Sponsor Testimony

The LEAD Act (HB643) - Delegate Aaron Kaufman

02/24/2026

Good afternoon Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and members of the Committee. I am Delegate Aaron Kaufman. I am here to request a favorable report on the HB643 - Police Training - Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026), as amended. This bill addresses a narrow but urgent public safety gap in Maryland's emergency response system, which is training to assist when an individual with autism, another intellectual or developmental disability, or dementia wanders or elopes — meaning the person leaves a safe or supervised setting without permission or awareness, often because of a disability or cognitive condition.

Children and youth with autism and other I/DD frequently wander from homes, community spaces, and schools. When that happens, these incidents can escalate quickly into time-critical emergencies where minutes matter and where the risks are both predictable and severe. National research shows that nearly half of children with autism attempt to elope after age four, and more than one in four go missing long enough to cause serious concern. The most common dangers in these situations are exposure to traffic and contact with bodies of water, which are also the leading causes of injury and death in elopement cases.

Despite these known risks, Maryland does not currently require uniform, statewide training that aligns law enforcement, emergency medical services (EMS), and 9-1-1 dispatch



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around elopement response protocols or disability-informed communication. As a result, response practices vary by jurisdiction, and outcomes can depend more on location than on best practices.

The LEAD Act addresses this gap by standardizing police training across state law enforcement systems that already respond to these emergencies. It requires the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to ensure officers receive entry-level and annual in-service training on wandering and elopement response, communication with individuals with non-apparent disabilities, and coordination with EMS and 9-1-1. It also directs the EMS Board the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS) to incorporate parallel training objectives and dispatch prompts into existing EMS education and medical protocols.

Importantly, this bill does not expand enforcement authority, create new response units, or impose rigid mandates. It builds on existing training infrastructure, allows agencies to meet or exceed state standards using equivalent curricula, and focuses on readiness, coordination, and public safety.

Other states have begun requiring autism-informed law enforcement training, reflecting a growing national consensus that disability-informed response is a core public safety responsibility. In Illinois, lawmakers enacted statewide autism-informed training requirements for all law enforcement officers to improve communication and response during crisis

AARON M. KAUFMAN
Legislative District 18
Montgomery County

Health Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 363
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3314
800-492-7122 Ext. 3314
Aaron.Kaufman@house.maryland.gov

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situations.² Minnesota requires autism training for police officers through its POST-aligned training programs, ensuring officers receive instruction as part of their professional certification and continuing education.⁴ In New York, legislators have advanced bills that would mandate disability-focused law enforcement training statewide, reflecting growing bipartisan recognition that disability-informed response is a core public safety responsibility.³ This bill positions Maryland as a leader by ensuring that police, EMS, and dispatch are trained together, using a shared framework, for the moments when coordination and time matters most.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on the HB643 - Police Training - Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026) as amended. Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.



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Footnotes

1. Rice CE, Zablotsky B, Avila RM, Colpe LJ, Schieve LA, Pringle B, Blumberg SJ.
Reported Wandering Behavior among Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or
Intellectual Disability. *J Pediatr.* 2016 Jul;174:232-239.e2. doi:
10.1016/j.jpeds.2016.03.047. Epub 2016 May 2. PMID: 27157446; PMCID:
PMC4983701, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4983701/>
2. NEW ILLINOIS LAW INCLUDES AUTISM-INFORMED LAW ENFORCEMENT
TRAINING (Kelly
2024).<https://www.wifr.com/2024/12/13/new-illinois-law-includes-autism-informed-law-enforcement-training/>
3. N.Y. LAWMAKERS PUSH TO MANDATE TRAINING FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT
TO HANDLE CALLS INVOLVING AUTISM, OTHER DISABILITIES (Arpey 2025).
<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/politics/2025/07/31/law-enforcement-disability-training>
4. TRAINING FOR OFFICERS AND EMERGENCY RESPONDERS (Autism Society of
Minnesota).
<https://ausm.org/education/training/training-for-officers-and-emergency-responders/>