



## **TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**

**HB0634: Police Training- Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026)**

**POSITION: Support**

**BY: Linda Kohn, President**

**DATE: February 24, 2026**

**The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports House Bill 634, which would require law enforcement officers to undergo training in how to more safely and effectively assist individuals with autism and dementia in crisis situations.**

The League supports policing practices that promote safety for both law enforcement officers and the communities they serve, and that train police to identify individuals with mental health conditions or disabilities, so that officers will request support from appropriate medical and mental health professionals.

The police training required by HB 634 will help officers better recognize and react appropriately to the needs of people with autism and dementia who are in crisis. They will learn how to de-escalate situations that could potentially lead to harm, and how to best coordinate with other agencies to urgently locate and rescue individuals who had wandered or eloped.

Nearly half of children with autism have eloped at least once.<sup>1</sup> This significantly increases their risks of severe injury or death, particularly from drowning or traffic accidents. And about 60 percent of individuals with dementia have a history of wandering, often repeatedly.<sup>2</sup>

**Mandatory training will help police officers better assist highly vulnerable individuals in hazardous situations who may be confused, non-verbal, unaware of dangers, or unable to respond appropriately to questions or commands. This training will lead to better crisis management, and will help save lives. The League of Women Voters of Maryland and its 2,000 members urge a favorable report on House Bill 634.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kennedykrieger.org/stories/nearly-half-children-autism-wander-or-bolt-safe-places#:~:text=49%20percent%20of%20children%20with,1%20percent%20of%20unaffected%20siblings.>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/stages-behaviors/wandering>