

FAVORABLE

Testimony in Support of House Bill 634 – (LEAD Act of 2026)

Good afternoon, Chairman, Vice Chair, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am Chief Linwood C. Alston, Chief of Police for the City of New Carrollton and a former Commissioner on the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission.

I am here in strong support of House Bill 634 -the LEAD Act of 2026.

This bill ensures that Maryland law enforcement officers receive specific training regarding individuals with dementia and autism particularly in situations involving wandering, elopement, and missing persons.

From a law enforcement perspective, these are not routine calls.

They are high-risk, time-sensitive emergencies.

Individuals with autism who elope are often drawn to water.

Individuals with dementia may become disoriented within blocks of their homes, wander into traffic, or appear uncooperative when they are simply confused.

Without proper training, those behaviors can be misinterpreted.

Misinterpretation can lead to escalation.

Escalation can lead to tragedy.

The LEAD Act ensures officers are trained in:

- Locating individuals who are wandering or missing
- Searching near bodies of water
- Sensory-aware approaches
- Reunification
- Proper documentation
- Interagency coordination

This is practical, operational training that saves lives.

But I also stand before you today not just as a police chief but as a son.

My mother is currently facing the realities of dementia.

I have seen how quickly confusion can set in. How someone who once guided you through life can suddenly become unsure of where they are.

If she were ever to wander, I would want the responding officers to understand that she is not resisting, not defiant she is afraid and confused.

Training transforms reaction into compassion.

Training transforms uncertainty into skill.

Training saves lives.

Maryland has led the nation in modern policing reforms and training standards. The LEAD Act continues that leadership by preparing officers for encounters that require patience, awareness, and coordination.

This bill protects vulnerable individuals, supports families, and equips officers with the tools they need to respond safely and effectively.

As a Chief of Police, I support it.

As a former Commissioner, I support it.

As a son, I thank you for considering it.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 634.

Thank you for your time.

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