

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
First Reader

House Bill 1163 (Delegate Patterson, *et al.*)  
Health and Government Operations

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**Task Force to Study Fencing for Bodies of Water and Playgrounds - Established**

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This bill establishes the Task Force to Study Fencing for Bodies of Water and Playgrounds. The task force must (1) review best practices for fencing bodies of water (including man-made bodies of water) and playgrounds; (2) assess how fencing and similar environmental interventions can be used to prevent injuries and fatalities that occur in or around bodies of water and playgrounds; (3) examine data and research related to incidents of wandering and drowning, with an emphasis on incidents involving individuals with autism; and (4) make recommendations on possible interventions to fence bodies of water and playgrounds to prevent injuries and fatalities. The State Coordinator for Autism Strategy (or their designee) must chair the task force, and the Maryland Autism Coalition must staff the task force. By July 1, 2026, the task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2025, and terminates June 30, 2027.**

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** The bill's requirements can be handled with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** Minimal.

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**Analysis**

**Bill Summary:** The task force consists of the following members:

- one member of the Senate, appointed by the President of the Senate;

- one member of the House of Delegates, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
- the Secretary of Housing and Community Development (or their designee);
- the Secretary of Planning (or their designee);
- the State Superintendent of Schools (or their designee);
- the Superintendent of the Maryland Park Service (or their designee);
- the State Coordinator for Autism Strategy (or their designee);
- the Executive Director of the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (or their designee);
- the Director of the Charles County Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism (or their designee);
- one representative of The Arc Maryland;
- one representative of the Charles County Parent Support Group;
- one representative of the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities at the Kennedy Krieger Institute;
- one representative of Pathfinders for Autism; and
- the following members appointed by the Governor: (1) at least one representative of the residential construction industry and (2) one representative of a homeowners association or an entity that represents homeowners associations.

**Current Law:** Chapter 341 of 2020 established a State Coordinator for Autism Strategy in the Department of Disabilities (MDOD) to (1) identify and evaluate existing services for individuals with autism and their families; (2) develop a strategic plan for addressing autism-related needs; (3) identify national benchmarks and other performance measures; and (4) monitor and evaluate the implementation of the strategic plan and the success of the State in addressing autism-related needs.

In general, there are no statutory requirements for fencing bodies of water in the State. However, local government ordinances may set requirements for specified safety measures around bodies of water, including fencing and signage. For instance, Montgomery County mandates that fencing and signage is required around stormwater ponds. Any publicly accessible pond must have warning signs posted on all sides and at major approaches, such as paths, if the pond is not surrounded by a continuous, permanent fence or barrier.

**Additional Comments:** The Maryland Autism Coalition comprises several nonprofit organizations, including Pathfinders for Autism, The Arc Maryland, the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities at the Kennedy Krieger Institute, and the Autism Society of Maryland. The coalition launched a [public service campaign](#) regarding water safety for people with autism and other developmental disabilities that may have wandered away from safe supervision.

## **Additional Information**

**Recent Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Charles County; Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Department of Disabilities; Maryland Department of Health; Department of Housing and Community Development; Department of Natural Resources; Maryland Department of Planning; Department of Legislative Services

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