



MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COALITION

Dedicated to the rights and quality of life for people with developmental disabilities in Maryland

HB1121 - Driver's Licenses, Identification Cards, and Registration Plates – Notation for Autism Spectrum House Environment and Transportation Committee March 3, 2022

Position: Oppose

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Coalition (DD Coalition) is comprised of five statewide organizations that are committed to improving the opportunities and outcomes for Marylanders with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

This bill would require an application for a driver's license, ID card, and registration plates through the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) to include a notation that the applicant is on the autism spectrum. While the bill is well-intended, and we understand some people want this in order to protect people who self-identify as having an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), **we believe the designation would create unintended consequences for people with ASD whether they decide to indicate their disability or not. If they do, it could impact their interactions with law enforcement, employers, the courts, and the general public. If they decline to indicate they are on the autism spectrum, it could also have implications especially when they do have an interaction with police or another first responder. We believe that training for first responders and community awareness of trauma informed care are most effective for supporting first responders in their interactions with people with IDD.**

A few county police departments have taken the lead in Maryland to train officers how to respond to a call involving someone who may have an IDD. For example, Montgomery County police have a specialized unit devoted to preparing officers to recognize signs that someone might have autism.ⁱ The Montgomery County police Autism/Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Alzheimer's and Dementia Outreach Unit helps prepare people with autism and their caregivers for safe interactions with police. The Howard County Police Department regularly receives training and education about ASD through a partnership with the Howard County Autism Societyⁱⁱ and there is a robust statewide initiative to train and prepare first responders for interactions with people with IDD.

In 2015, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation to create the **Ethan Saylor Alliance (ESA) for Self Advocates As Educators.**ⁱⁱⁱ The ESA provides training for members of law enforcement and other public service entities on specific needs of those with developmental and intellectual disabilities.^{iv} Under the ESA, self-advocates take the central role in educating and informing the community in regard to the specific needs of those with disabilities. To date, thousands of first responders have been trained through



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the efforts of the Ethan Saylor Alliance to safely and supportively interact with people with disabilities, including people who may have ASD.^v

In 2020, the Maryland General Assembly passed SB885/HB1118 (Ch. 427) to require the Maryland MVA to provide voluntary Developmental Disability Self-Disclosure Cards.^{vi} These cards may be used by someone with ASD or other developmental disability to self-disclose a disability to police. The cards are kept with a person's registration and driver's license. On one side of the card, the person with disabilities can include information about his/her/their disability, how they communicate, and any other pertinent information to share with law enforcement personnel. The cards are designed to signal to officers that the driver has a disability and that they may need to communicate differently. The color "blue" is the nationally recognized color for autism awareness. Although not everyone who discloses a disability will have autism, this color helps the card stand out, and make it easier for members of law enforcement to identify the voluntary disability disclosure document. The MVA now has these cards available upon request.^{vii}

Nothing in either of these laws requires the creation of an electronic record of the voluntary disability disclosure as HB1121 would do. We are concerned about the government collecting information about a person's disability, including how long the information would be stored even after a person decides to remove the notation/designation. **That protection is very important to the DD Coalition. We worked very closely with the General Assembly in 2020 to make sure the self-disclosure card preserved the rights of the person, avoided stigma, protected people from targeted victimization, and protected those who do not self-identify to be treated with the same compassion and understanding as other citizens.**

We believe the self-disclosure card helps people with developmental disabilities, including ASD, and results in better outcomes in police encounters. Since those exist, and because HB 1121 does not address our concerns, we cannot support this legislation.

For more information, please contact:
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ⁱ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/pol/howdoI/autism-alzheimer-outreach.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://bizmonthly.com/hcpd-recruit-class-partners-with-autism-society/>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2015RS/chapters_noln/Ch_387_sb0853T.pdf

^{iv} <http://mdod.maryland.gov/about/Pages/Saylor-Alliance.aspx>

^v <http://mdod.maryland.gov/about/Documents/LEAD%2020-21%20Final%20Report.pdf>, pages 13-18 for goals and outcomes from 20-21 training year.

^{vi} https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2020RS/Chapters_noln/CH_427_hb1118t.pdf

