



**Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council**

CREATING CHANGE · IMPROVING LIVES



**House Ways and Means Committee
HB 5: Education – Playground Accessibility – Communication Boards
January 24, 2023
Position: Support with Amendments**

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) is an independent, public policy organization that creates changes to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide advocacy organization dedicated to the rights and quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Both organizations believe people with and without disabilities in Maryland can and should live, learn, work, and play together. This bill is another step towards making that a reality, especially with the following amendments:

(A) IN THIS SECTION, “COMMUNICATION BOARD” MEANS A DEVICE THAT DISPLAYS PHOTOS, SYMBOLS, OR ILLUSTRATIONS **WITH WORDS AND BRAILLE TO SUPPLEMENT OR REPLACE SPOKEN LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATION.** ~~ENABLE INDIVIDUALS WITH LIMITED LANGUAGE SKILLS TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES AND COMMUNICATE.~~

(B) ON OR BEFORE OCTOBER 1, 2028, EACH COUNTY BOARD SHALL CONSTRUCT A COMMUNICATION BOARD IN EACH PUBLIC SCHOOL PLAYGROUND UNDER ITS JURISDICTION **THAT ARE REASONABLY CONSISTENT.**

WHAT does this legislation do?

- This bill requires that county boards of education add communication boards to all public school playgrounds in the State by October 1, 2028.

WHY is this legislation important?

- Communication boards can be great tools to help children with limited verbal English language skills to express themselves. For both children with disabilities and children for whom English is not their first language, communication boards help promote inclusive play and interaction with friends.
- There is a greater need for communication boards in Maryland schools. The number of students with disabilities in Maryland has increased over the last ten years. The number of English Language Learners in Maryland schools has doubled in the last ten years.
- There are 1,427 public schools in Maryland. To date, there are eight public elementary schools with communication boards, all in Howard County.
- Communication boards, especially when paired with other inclusive playground features, encourage a sense of community for children and adults. The Council collaborated with the Maryland Department of Disabilities to create a framework to support inclusive playgrounds across the state.

HB 5 takes a proactive approach to ensuring that children feel included and comfortable when they visit public school playgrounds. **In order to ensure they help create a more inclusive and welcoming place to play for all children, communication boards must include photos, symbols, or illustrations AND words and braille.** Communication boards are one of many actions that can move all of our parks towards accessibility for all Marylanders with disabilities, therefore the DD Council and The Arc Maryland support HB 5 with the proposed amendments.

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