

**CRAIG J. ZUCKER**  
*Legislative District 14*  
Montgomery County



James Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street, Room 120  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3625  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3625  
Craig.Zucker@senate.state.md.us

Budget and Taxation Committee  
Chair, Capital Budget Subcommittee

Chair, Senate Democratic Caucus

**THE SENATE OF MARYLAND**  
**ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401**

**Testimony of Senator Craig J. Zucker**  
**Senate Bill 851- Public Schools - Individuals With Disabilities - Main Entrance**  
**Accessibility and Emergency Planning**  
**March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025**  
**1:00pm**  
**Position: Favorable With Amendment**

Good afternoon, Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and distinguished members of the EEE Committee. It is my pleasure to testify today in support of **Senate Bill 851- Public Schools - Individuals With Disabilities - Main Entrance Accessibility and Emergency Planning**. I would like to thank the co-sponsors, Senators Augustine and Lewis-Young for their support. I also want to thank Delegate Aaron Kaufman for his outstanding efforts and leadership on this issue.

This bill is a crucial step toward ensuring public schools are accessible and safe for all students, particularly those with disabilities. It requires transparency and accountability, ensuring that every student, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to learn and thrive in a fully accessible environment.

This bill addresses a critical gap in school accessibility and safety. Despite the ADA being law for 35 years, we lack comprehensive data on how many Maryland schools have inaccessible main entrances. What we do know is that many of our schools, especially older buildings, still have barriers that limit access for people with disabilities. This bill seeks to address that by requiring county boards of education to publish, by September 1, 2025, and annually thereafter, the number of main entrances that are not accessible.

We have also worked on an amendment (attached) that specifies that the report should include whether these entrances are accessible to students with physical disabilities who use wheelchairs, whether at least one entrance has an automatic door opener, and whether the entrances comply with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

This bill builds on SB 1265, passed in 2018, which required school emergency plans to accommodate students with disabilities. However, a significant issue remains: school safety evaluations, emergency plans, and local law enforcement guidelines are exempt from the Maryland Public Information Act. This prevents parents and citizens from verifying whether schools are meeting these essential requirements. Senate Bill 851 addresses this gap by requiring local school systems to submit their emergency plans to the State Department

of Education, ensuring public access and accountability. This transparency will allow parents to verify whether schools are meeting the needs of students with disabilities during emergencies.

New York, Connecticut, California, Indiana, Tennessee, New Jersey, and Massachusetts have already enacted similar laws to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to school facilities and are properly accommodated in emergency situations. Maryland should follow suit to protect all students' rights and safety.

By requiring both transparency on accessibility issues and updates to emergency plans, Senate Bill 851 strengthens school safety and supports the rights of students with disabilities. I respectfully request a **favorable report as amended on Senate Bill 851**. Thank you for your consideration.