

Good morning Esteemed Members of the General Assembly,

My name is Marc Easton, and I live in Baltimore with my wife, Cristina and our 5-year-old son, Ellis, who is a person with autism. As many of you who know people on the spectrum are undoubtedly aware – there is a boundless joy they exude that is a genuine pleasure to witness and a privilege in which to be entrusted. But this joy comes with a heavy cost. Our son is curious, intelligent, affectionate, but keenly unaware of danger especially as respects water and its power. He loves the pool but cannot yet swim though we continue to teach and enjoy the water safely.

I'm reminded on a family vacation in Ocean City. We'd driven, gotten settled and were taking a walk on the beach. I was weary from a long drive and carrying luggage when Ellis bolted full speed towards a choppy ocean. My wife and I sprang into action, but at 54 my explosive speed is little more than a memory while Ellis' only grows in strength and stamina.

This creates a dynamic where my wife and I must position ourselves in the opposing directions of his potential path. This requires clairvoyance and high alert without waiver or inconsistency. It is exhausting. The beach, playground, park, restaurant – the same scenario. We've endeavored to make our home safe so that he may feel some sense of independence. We would like to extend that to outdoor activity as well, but all too often the crashing waves or blaring traffic just in his path is the harsh reminder this is not our reality.

It may seem a small thing to some, but I'd love to sit on a bench and watch my son play on the playground instead of hovering or not worry he can access the water if speed fails me that day.

It is my sincere hope that you establish this task force and build fencing or barricades where appropriate it could mean the difference between that boundless joy expanding or being unthinkably extinguished.

Respectfully,

The Eastons

Marc, Cristina and Ellis