



**HOUSE BILL 1204: Public and Nonpublic Schools -
Student Elopement - Notice and Reporting
Requirements
February 27, 2025
POSITION: Support with Amendments**

Pathfinders for Autism (PFA) is Maryland's largest autism organization dedicated to helping individuals, parents, and professionals find resources, support, and training while working to increase awareness of autism spectrum disorders. We accomplish this through a variety of programs and services with a focus on safety, community and resources. Last year our programs directly served 19,980 Maryland residents. Our safety programs include trainings for caregivers on the risks and strategies related to wandering and elopement. We also include a section on wandering and elopement and search and rescue for critical missing in our law enforcement trainings.

1:43 Maryland children are diagnosed with Autism (CDC 2023 Autism and Developmental Disability Monitoring Report). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1:6 children are diagnosed with some type of developmental disability. According to the NIH, 26.7% of children with an intellectual/developmental disability elope, while 49% of children with autism elope, and often from a safe environment. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) estimates more than one-third of children with autism cannot communicate their name, address or phone number if they are found. Of the deaths that occur from wandering and elopement, **71% are caused by drowning**. According to the National Autism Association, children with autism are **160 times as likely to die from drowning** as the general pediatric population. Elopers also face non-lethal trauma ranging from near drownings, vehicular injuries, sexual assault and restraints, to exposure, dehydration and psychological harm.

Elopement behavior at school can be addressed with specific goals and objectives in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). In addition, the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) processes offer proactive ways of addressing the behavior. House Bill 1204 would require notification to parents within 24 hours if their child elopes, but the notice is not required if the student has an IEP or BIP that addresses wandering or eloping behavior. Without this notification, the parents are not made aware that the IEP and BIP may not be effective as currently written and may require changes. Additionally, if a child elopes from school, their parents should be notified that day, not 24 hours later, so they can take appropriate steps to ensure that their child is safe after school and during the evening.

Pathfinders for Autism support HB1204 with the following amendments:

- Remove the reference to 24 hour notice and substitute same day notice
- Remove subsection B which does not require schools to notify parents if the student has an IEP or BIP that includes language addressing wandering and elopement behavior

For more information, please contact Rebecca Rienzi, Executive Director, Pathfinders for Autism at 443-330-5370, ext. 101 or rrienzi@pfamd.org