



## Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

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### House Ways and Means Committee

### HB 694: Public Schools - Individuals With Disabilities - Main Entrance Accessibility and Emergency Planning

February 25, 2025

### Position: Support with Sponsor's Amendments

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (Council) creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. From this perspective, the Council supports HB 694 as a step toward making Maryland a place where everyone can access their schools fairly and equitably.

#### WHAT does this legislation do?

- Requires each Local Education Agency (LEA) to post online and submit to the General Assembly the number of main entrances to public school buildings that are (1) not accessible for individuals with disabilities and (2) do not comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Each LEA must also share a copy of their emergency plan to MSDE and the General Assembly.

The following amendment to §7-136 is needed to ensure all students can access the school buildings easily and without delay:

- Add to page 2, line 6 after not, **PHYSICALLY** accessible **FOR STUDENTS WHO USE WHEELCHAIRS, INCLUDING WHETHER OR NOT AT LEAST ONE MAIN ENTRANCE HAS AN AUTOMATIC DOOR OPENER, AND WHETHER OR** not **THE MAIN ENTRANCES ARE** in compliance with...

#### WHY is this legislation important?

- **Students with disabilities have the right to accessible, public education.** This means buildings meet the minimum requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and services required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are in place so students with disabilities are safe and supported, including during emergencies.
- **Too often, students with disabilities are not adequately supported during emergencies.** Published stories about students with disabilities being left alone during fire drills or not being notified at all about emergencies reveal there still is much work to be done.<sup>1</sup>
- **Schools need to implement their emergency plans to keep everyone safe.** In 2017, the Maryland General Assembly passed HB 1061 (§7-435) to require LEAs address the needs of students, staff, and visitors with disabilities in their emergency plans. HB 694 will follow through on that requirement to ensure these plans are being developed as intended.

***While investments in education equity are without question needed, including for people with disabilities, the Council believes that the amount, purpose, and timing of such efforts must take into consideration the needs of all Marylanders with disabilities. Funding for this bill should not be offset by limiting essential funding for other critical needs, most immediately the DDA community services that thousands of Marylanders depend upon.***

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2024/11/10/disabled-students-active-shooter-drills/>