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Senate Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee

Re: House Bill 1000 – Public Schools - School Mapping Data - Radius of School Grounds

Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB1000, sponsored by Delegate McCaskill. My name is Shari Bailey. I am the Founder of Laila's Gift, a Maryland nonprofit that supports families of individuals with non-apparent disabilities. First and always, I am a mother and caregiver.

This submission represents a meaningful milestone. It is the **final written testimony for the five bills that together form The LEAD Act**. After months of collaboration, advocacy, and bipartisan leadership, Maryland stands at the threshold of establishing a comprehensive, life-saving framework to address elopement as a public safety emergency across the lifespan.

My daughter Laila is diagnosed with a rare syndrome. She is nonverbal and also has autism. She does not understand danger in the way most people do. She cannot call out for help if she is lost. She cannot share her name or explain where she belongs.

The first time she eloped, everything changed.

There was no warning and no sound. Only the sudden realization that she was gone. In those moments, the mind does not go to policy. It goes to survival. It goes to the most immediate and dangerous possibilities. And above all, it goes to water.

For many individuals with autism and related conditions, water is deeply compelling. The movement, the reflection, the stillness. But without an understanding of depth, current, or danger, that attraction can quickly become fatal.



Through Laila's Gift, we see this pattern repeatedly. Families live with constant vigilance. Near-misses are far too common. And tragically, not all stories end safely. In 2024, our community came together to honor the life of a young boy who was nonverbal and lived with autism who drowned after eloping.

Data reinforces what families already know. Nearly half of children with autism will wander or elope. A significant percentage of those incidents result in fatal outcomes. The overwhelming majority of those fatalities involve water.

For this reason, national search and rescue guidance consistently emphasizes a critical principle: when a vulnerable individual is missing, responders should prioritize nearby bodies of water.

However, responders can only act on what they can quickly and clearly identify.

HB1000 addresses this gap in a direct and practical way.

By requiring the identification and mapping of bodies of water and environmental hazards within a one-mile radius of school grounds, this legislation provides first responders with essential geographic clarity. In an emergency, there is no time for uncertainty. The ability to immediately locate and prioritize high-risk areas can mean the difference between life and loss.

This bill strengthens coordination between schools and first responders, improves response time during the most critical window, and aligns Maryland's safety infrastructure with established best practices.

Importantly, HB1000 is part of a broader, coordinated effort. Within The LEAD Act framework, it works in alignment with HB 634 and its cross-file SB 745, which strengthen first responder training for elopement-related emergencies, as well as HB1434, HB1117, and HB1182, which together establish a comprehensive approach to preparing for and responding to potentially life-threatening elopement incidents. Training ensures responders understand what to look for and how to quickly help. Mapping ensures they know where to search first. Access to clear resources and information transforms uncertainty into informed action, and true progress depends on collaboration across families, schools, and emergency responders. Together, these measures form a stronger, more responsive system designed to save lives. Preparedness in this context is not theoretical. It is lifesaving.

HB1000 introduces readiness. It reflects data, aligns with national guidance, and acknowledges the realities families face every day.

Maryland now has a unique opportunity to lead. Passage of this legislation, as part of the full LEAD Act framework, would position the state as a national model for addressing elopement emergencies in a coordinated and compassionate way, with the potential to save thousands of lives over time.



I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1000 and continued support to advance all five bills within The LEAD Act to final passage.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to protecting Maryland's most vulnerable residents.

Warm regards,



Shari Bailey
Founder, CEO, Caregiver
Laila's Gift