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**Date:** April 1, 2026

**Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee**

**Re:** HB1182 – Public and Nonpublic Schools – Student Elopement – Locative Devices

**Position:** SUPPORT

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

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 and advocates for policies that improve safety and quality of life for caregivers and those they support. Most importantly, I am the mother of my daughter, Laila, who is nonverbal, autistic, and lives with a rare genetic syndrome.

Laila is what professionals refer to as an eloper. Like many children with autism and related conditions, she is at risk of leaving a safe environment without understanding danger or the ability to call for help. This risk is not hypothetical for our family. It is formally documented in her Individualized Education Program, where elopement is identified as a known safety concern.

For families like mine, elopement is not a theoretical issue. It is a daily reality. Many children with autism and developmental disabilities are drawn toward water, roads, or unfamiliar places, often without the ability to communicate their needs or recognize danger. For us, safety planning is not optional. It is essential.

Every day, we balance the desire to give our children independence with the responsibility to keep them safe. When a child elopes, every second matters.

HB1182 offers a practical, compassionate solution. It creates a pathway for families and schools to voluntarily incorporate locative technology into a student's IEP when appropriate. It does not mandate technology. Instead, it enables coordination.

That coordination is critical.

Through my work with Laila's Gift, I have spoken with families across Maryland who face this fear every day. One mother shared a story that illustrates both the risk and the opportunity before us.



Her nonverbal son eloped from school. When staff realized he was missing, panic set in. The response was a walkie-talkie search, with staff trying to locate him as quickly as possible. A paraeducator ultimately found him four blocks away and ran across a busy intersection to bring him to safety. Thankfully, he was found. But it took nearly fifteen minutes.

After that experience, the mother made the difficult decision to remove her child from school.

What makes this even more significant is that her son was already wearing a locator device as part of his safety plan. However, there was no clear framework for the school to coordinate with her or use that information. If there had been, those fifteen minutes could likely have been reduced to just a couple of minutes. In situations like this, minutes matter. Seconds matter.

HB1182 addresses this gap by allowing locative devices to be included in a student's IEP as part of a coordinated safety plan. This supports:

- Clear communication between families and school staff
- Defined protocols in the event of elopement
- Faster response times when a child goes missing
- A shared understanding of how safety tools can be used appropriately

This bill is about enabling partnership. It gives families and schools the ability to work together using tools that may already be in place to protect a child.

Elopement is not rare within the disability community. It is a frequent and deeply frightening reality. Policies like HB1182 help ensure that children with disabilities can safely participate in school environments while maintaining safeguards that protect their well-being.

When caregivers and schools are better aligned, children are safer, families have greater peace of mind, and communities are better prepared to respond.

As a mother, an advocate, and the founder of an organization dedicated to protecting vulnerable individuals, I respectfully urge the Committee to **issue a favorable report on HB1182.**

This legislation recognizes a simple but critical truth: when a vulnerable child goes missing, every moment matters. Creating a pathway for coordination around voluntary safety tools can help ensure that children like Laila are found quickly and returned safely.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,



Shari Bailey  
Founder, CEO, Caregiver  
Laila's Gift