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Senate Finance Committee

Re: House Bill 1117 – Elopement Response Devices – Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias Council and the Advisory Stakeholder Group on Autism-Related Needs - Recommendations for Elopement Response Devices

Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Madam Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Shari Bailey, and I am the founder of Laila's Gift, a Maryland nonprofit dedicated to supporting individuals with non-apparent disabilities and the families who care for them. I am also the mother of a nonverbal daughter with autism and a rare genetic syndrome who is at risk of elopement. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 1117.

For families like mine, elopement is not simply wandering. It is a life-threatening emergency that can occur in seconds. Many children and adults with autism, dementia, and other cognitive disabilities experience elopement behaviors that place them at risk of traffic accidents, drowning, exposure, or other serious harm.

House Bill 1117 addresses a critical gap in how we define, understand, and deploy safety tools for individuals at risk. This legislation establishes a clear definition of elopement response devices, recognizing them as essential assistive safety tools that support prevention, rapid response, and recovery when an individual goes missing.

These devices may include wearable technologies, door and window alert systems, and other tools that help caregivers and first responders act quickly and effectively in an emergency. By clearly defining these tools in statute, Maryland can create a more consistent and informed approach to how they are recommended, understood, and utilized across care settings.

For many families, these technologies are the difference between minutes and tragedy. Yet today, there is no standardized pathway to ensure families are informed about these options or that professionals across systems are aligned in how they recommend them as part of a comprehensive safety plan.



House Bill 1117 creates the opportunity to:

- Establish a formal definition of elopement response devices as life-saving assistive technology
- Support more consistent and informed recommendations by providers, care teams, and community systems
- Strengthen safety planning for individuals at risk across the lifespan
- Improve coordination between caregivers and first responders during critical incidents
- Help prevent injuries and fatalities among vulnerable Marylanders

Elopement is a reality faced by thousands of families across the lifespan. Children with autism, adults with intellectual disabilities, and older adults living with dementia are all at risk. Maryland has an opportunity to lead the nation by recognizing that clearly defined, well-integrated safety tools save lives.

House Bill 1117 is one of five bills included in The LEAD Act, a comprehensive, bipartisan initiative designed to strengthen Maryland's preparedness and coordination when elopement incidents occur. Together, these measures ensure that families, schools, healthcare providers, and first responders have the awareness, coordination, and training needed to respond quickly and effectively when a vulnerable individual goes missing.

As both a mother and an advocate, I know firsthand how terrifying it is to lose sight of a loved one who cannot communicate their location, name, address, or danger. Caregivers should not have to navigate these risks without clear guidance, support, and access to the tools that can save lives.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to give **House Bill 1117 a favorable report.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,

Shari Bailey
Founder, CEO, Caregiver
Laila's Gift