



LAILA'S GIFT
Celebrating One Gift at a Time

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Date: March 31, 2026

Senate Finance Committee

Re: HB1434 – Maryland Department of Health – Caregiver Resource Webpage – Establishment

Position: **SUPPORT**

My name is Shari Bailey, Founder of Laila's Gift, a Maryland nonprofit dedicated to supporting families of individuals with non-apparent disabilities and advancing policies that improve safety and quality of life. I am also the mother and caregiver of my daughter, Laila, who is nonverbal, lives with autism, and has a rare genetic syndrome.

I am here to express my strong support for House Bill 1434 and to provide clarity on both the need for this legislation and the important definition of a family caregiver.

A family caregiver is not defined by age or diagnosis. A caregiver may be a parent supporting a child with complex needs, a spouse caring for a partner, or an adult child supporting an aging loved one. Caregiving spans the entire lifespan, and regardless of where someone falls on that journey, families face a common challenge: navigating a fragmented and overwhelming system of resources.

There has been some misunderstanding that a centralized caregiver resource already exists. While many valuable websites are available across different agencies, there is currently no single, unified, caregiver-centered entry point that connects resources across the lifespan. As a result, families are still left to navigate multiple systems on their own, a process that can take months. In some cases, I have spoken with families who have spent years, even up to three, searching for the right information without success.

This is not feasible because time is not a luxury most caregivers have. When families are forced to spend months or even years searching for the right information, it delays access to critical supports, services, and safety planning that can directly impact a loved one's well-being. In situations like elopement risk, those delays can have life-threatening consequences.

It also places an unnecessary emotional and mental burden on caregivers who are already managing complex, demanding responsibilities. Instead of focusing on care, they are forced to become navigators of fragmented systems, often without clear guidance.



Beyond the personal impact, this inefficiency leads to missed opportunities for early intervention, increased strain on emergency services, and higher long-term costs for the state. When caregivers cannot easily find the right resources, small challenges can escalate into crises that could have been prevented with timely support.

Ultimately, a system that is difficult to navigate is a system that fails the very people it is meant to serve.

For caregivers, this is not just inconvenient, it is overwhelming.

When my daughter Laila was identified as being at risk of elopement, I was faced with urgent and frightening questions. Where do I find guidance on safety planning? What resources are available to prevent elopement? How do I prepare for an emergency? Some of the information I needed existed, but it was scattered across agencies, difficult to locate, and not organized in a way that supported caregivers in real time. In other cases, critical safety planning information for elopement emergencies (which is a public safety issue in our state) did not exist.

This bill addresses that gap.

A centralized, caregiver-focused webpage would serve as a true gateway, bringing together critical information in one place, including safety planning tools, emergency preparedness guidance, respite care options, disability services, and aging resources. It would not replace existing systems, but instead connect them in a way that is intuitive, accessible, and built around the real-life needs of caregivers.

According to AARP Maryland, more than 1.2 million Marylanders are serving as family caregivers. For these families, simplifying access to information is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

Through my work with Laila's Gift, I hear from caregivers across Maryland every day who are struggling to find the right resources at the right time. The need for a coordinated, easy-to-navigate entry point is one of the most consistent challenges families face.

House Bill 1434 is a practical, compassionate solution that acknowledges caregiving as a lifespan issue and strengthens how our state supports families.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to **issue a favorable report on House Bill 1434.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,



Shari Bailey
Founder, CEO, Caregiver
Laila's Gift