



**BILL: HB 1117**

**POSITION: FWA - Favorable with Amendments**

COMMITTEE: Finance

HEARING DATE: April 1, 2026

SUBMITTED BY: Maryland Department of Disabilities

217 East Redwood Street, Suite 1300, Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Committee Members

The Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) is pleased to submit this letter of support with amendments for **HB 1117, Virginia L. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Council and the Advisory Stakeholder Group on Autism-Related Needs - Recommendations for Elopement Devices**. MDOD houses the State Coordinator for Autism Strategy ("the Coordinator") who chairs and staffs the Advisory Stakeholder Group for Autism-Related Needs (ASGARN). MDOD requests amendments to clarify the legislation, as well as align it with best practices regarding assistive technology and better integrate it into ASGARN's functions.

MDOD supports the goal of increasing access to elopement response devices for those who want and require them. We are concerned with the current language in HB 1117 authorizing ASGARN to "recommend the use of elopement response devices." As written, this could be interpreted as a directive to a government advisory group to endorse commercial products or provide clinical recommendations to individuals to use a particular product.

MDOD believes that the selection of assistive technology should be a clinical process led by trained professionals, such as occupational therapists or licensed assistive technology professionals. These clinicians can perform comprehensive assessments to match a device's specific features—such as GPS tracking, two-way communication, or specialized mounting for sensory sensitivities—to an individual's unique needs. Furthermore, MDOD hesitates to have one of its advisory bodies recommend specific commercial products. Appearing to promote particular vendors could present significant ethics and liability concerns for ASGARN members and the State.

To address these concerns, MDOD proposes amendments to reflect the types of policy-based activities performed by the Coordinator and ASGARN. As laid out in statute in 7-112, ASGARN's role is to consult with and advise the Coordinator on the State's autism strategy. To maintain consistency with existing statute, MDOD requests that ASGARN's role be amended in HB 1117 to that of consulting with the Coordinator to recommend policies that improve individualized access to

these tools (accomplished through Amendments 1 and 2 below). MDOD also proposes an amendment to integrate these efforts into the statutorily-required Maryland Strategic Plan for Autism-Related Needs (Amendment 3)..

MDOD Amendment 1:

Page 4, Line 8: Strike “7-112.1” and replace with “7-111.1”

MDOD Amendment 2:

Page 5, Line 10: Strike “Advisory Stakeholder Group on Autism-Related Needs” and replace with “State Coordinator for Autism Strategy”

Page 5, Line 11: Strike “may recommend” and replace with “shall, as part of the strategic plan required under 7-111 of this subtitle, make recommendations to address the risks of wandering and elopement, including”

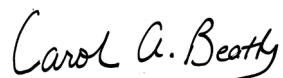
So that page 5, lines 10-12 would read: (B) THE ~~ADVISORY STAKEHOLDER GROUP ON AUTISM-RELATED NEEDS~~ STATE COORDINATOR FOR AUTISM STRATEGY ~~MAY RECOMMEND~~ SHALL, AS PART OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN REQUIRED UNDER SECTION 7-111 OF THIS SUBTITLE, MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE RISKS OF WANDERING AND ELOPEMENT, INCLUDING THE USE OF ELOPEMENT RESPONSE DEVICES AS SAFETY TOOLS FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE AT RISK OF ELOPEMENT BECAUSE OF AUTISM.

MDOD Amendment 3

In Maryland Human Services Article, at 7-111(c), we recommend adding a new 7-111(c)(7) that specifies: “(7) assessing resources to address wandering and elopement, including the use of elopement response devices, as specified in 7-111.1.”

Thank you for your careful attention to this critical issue. We respectfully request **a favorable report on HB 1117 with adoption of these amendments**. We look forward to working with the Committee to ensure this legislation effectively supports Marylanders with autism and their families.

Sincerely,



Carol Beatty  
Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities