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**HB 1117 – Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementias Council
and the Advisory Stakeholder Group on Autism-Related Needs –
Recommendations for Elopement Response Devices
Senate Finance Committee
April 1, 2026
FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon, Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1117 regarding elopement response devices. We appreciate Delegate Lopez and the many cosponsors of this important legislation.

My name is Sara Westrick, Advocacy Director for AARP Maryland, representing approximately 850,000 members and bringing the experiences and priorities of Marylanders over 50 to policy discussions.

We worked closely with Laila’s Gift and other partners to develop the LEAD Act package of bills, including HB 1117, which addresses the often-overlooked issue of elopement and wandering among individuals with cognitive, developmental, and neurological conditions.

Elopement affects thousands of Maryland families, caregivers, schools, and long-term care providers each year. Children and adults with autism, Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias, and other conditions frequently wander or attempt to leave safe environments, creating life-threatening risks. Families live with the constant fear that a loved one may slip out a door or window and encounter traffic, water, extreme temperatures, or other hazards. HB 1117 recognizes elopement as a public health and safety issue.

AARP Maryland supported the original bill and continues to do so, as amended. This bill defines “elopement response device” and authorizes the Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementias Council and the Advisory Stakeholder Group on Autism-Related Needs to recommend the use of elopement response devices as safety tools. This is a critical part of the solution to elopement because these devices are not optional but essential safety tools for many families.

HB 1117 provides support to families across the lifespan, particularly those caring for individuals with autism, dementia, or other cognitive disabilities. For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1117.

If you have any questions, please contact Sara Westrick at swestrick@aarp.org or 410-310-0374.

