

Date: April 1, 2026

Senate Finance Committee Re: House Bill 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 (LEAD Act of 2026)

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Madam Beidle and Vice Chair Hayes

My name is Maddy Ciotola, and I am the parent of Lincoln, a 4 year-old boy living with Angelman Syndrome. His diagnosis means that Lincoln will be non-verbal for life, live with an intellectual disability, and have a seizure disorder. Locative devices are crucial for piece of mind for parents of non-verbal, special needs children, and even more so when they have an intellectual disability.

Lincoln started preK this past fall and the thought of that cause our family a lot of concerns and anxiety surrounding him riding a bus, being with caregivers that don't fully-understand him and the potential for him to elope, get lost, or hurt. His locative device gave us a small piece of mind, especially surrounding the bus route and transitions to and from school.

The benefits of a device cannot be understated. However, the devices can be cost-prohibitive for many families. Being a caregiver for a special needs child is time-consuming and even more difficult if that child is also medically complex. Navigating insurance, benefits, therapies, and many other appointments, can make full-time employment more difficult. Even if a family has the support to be able to work or make a decent income, the cost can still be tough to bare.

Devices typically must be purchased then a monthly maintenance or service plan needs to be purchased as well to maintain GPS or cellular functions. For example, our device can be purchased for \$225, then a monthly plan ranging from \$45 to \$65 needs to be paid. Depending on the need, there are different devices with different price points.

There are a variety of services and many benefits that the devices provide giving overworked and overtired parents peace of mind and the smallest relief of anxiety surrounding the child's potential for eloping.

The devices are also mutually beneficial for schools, law enforcement, and EMS. They can mitigate risks to for all parties while ensuring our children and loves ones remain safe.

Legislation like House Bill 1117 helps families access life-saving devices for their kids while creating safer environments for students who may require additional protections due to

disability, cognitive differences, or medical conditions. This gives schools and families the ability to work together on safety planning, Maryland can better protect vulnerable students while respecting privacy and family choice. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1117. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Maddy Ciotola

Mother to Lincoln, Age 4, Angelman Syndrome

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