

Carol A. Beatty, Secretary
Anne Blackfield, Deputy Secretary



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor

HB 1117
April 1, 2026

Favorable with
Amendments

House Finance
Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Victoria Rodríguez-Roldán
State Coordinator for Autism Strategy, MDOD
Chair of Advisory Stakeholder Group on Autism Related Needs

Dear Members of the Finance Committee,

In my capacity as the State Coordinator for Autism Strategy and Chair of the Advisory Stakeholder Group for Autism-Related Needs (ASGARN), I am 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**. HB 1117 proposes in part to authorize ASGARN to make recommendations on elopement response devices for autistic individuals. I support MDOD's proposed amendments, which are included in MDOD's written testimony.

The broad purpose of the MDOD amendments is to ensure that wandering and elopement, including recommendations regarding access to elopement response devices, becomes a formal part of the Statewide Autism Strategic Plan required under Maryland Human Services Article § 7-111. I will note that while the topic of wandering and elopement is not specifically mentioned in § 7-111, ASGARN recognizes the urgency and importance of wandering and elopement. I believe that specifically adding wandering and elopement to the statutory requirements for the strategic plan in § 7-111 will ensure that it remains a priority of ASGARN's work in the future.

MDOD Amendments 1 and 2: Reassigning Implementation to the Coordinator

Amendments 1 and 2 propose moving HB 1117 from Maryland Human Services Article § 7-112.1 to § 7-111.1, and clarifying that the Coordinator shall ensure that recommendations regarding access to elopement response devices are part of the autism strategic plan.

Maryland Human Services Article § 7-111 establishes the Governor-appointed State Coordinator for Autism Strategy within MDOD. In consultation with ASGARN, the Coordinator's core duties are to identify and evaluate existing services for individuals with autism and their families, and to develop, monitor, and evaluate a strategic plan for addressing autism-related needs in the State. This plan must include national benchmarks and other performance measures to evaluate success in areas such as employment, housing, health care, and training for first responders and criminal justice professionals. The Coordinator is required in § 7-111 to submit an annual report

to the Secretary of Disabilities, the Governor, and the General Assembly regarding the development, implementation, and effectiveness of the strategic plan.

Maryland Human Services Article § 7-112 establishes ASGARN, designates the Coordinator as the chair, and specifies the group membership. Per § 7-112, ASGARN's primary mandate is to work with the Coordinator on the State's strategic plan required under § 7-111 for addressing autism-related needs. This work includes four key responsibilities: identifying and evaluating existing services for individuals with autism and their families, developing the strategic plan, promoting and evaluating its implementation, and recommending changes as necessary.

I agree with MDOD's amendments to move HB 1117 under § 7-111 as § 7-111.1 and clarifying that the Coordinator (rather than ASGARN) must ensure that recommendations are made regarding wandering and elopement. While ASGARN is responsible for providing input and monitoring implementation of the strategic plan, the Coordinator bears the ultimate responsibility of ensuring the strategic plan is developed, implemented, and reported on to the Governor and the General Assembly.

I also support MDOD Amendment 2's clarification that the Coordinator and ASGARN's recommendations regarding elopement devices should be provided in the strategic plan and therefore should be policy-oriented. ASGARN's diverse membership—which includes legislators, self-advocates, caregivers, and educators—was not designed for technical assistive technology expertise. Requiring specific product recommendations would exceed the group's original scope, possibly risk exposing the members to improper solicitations from product vendors, and create potential liability for the State should someone be harmed by a recommended device. Amendment 2 correctly aligns the new legislative mandate with ASGARN's role in advising on policies and programs rather than specific commercial products.

MDOD Amendment 3: Aligning Amendment 2 with the Autism Strategic Plan

MDOD's Amendment 3 proposes to add assessing the efficacy of wandering and elopement resources, including elopement response devices, to the autism strategic plan required in § 7-111. Amendment 3 merely aligns Amendment 2 with the autism strategic plan.

The use of technology is one important piece of the puzzle for addressing the risks of elopement; it is also a deeply personal choice whose use must be tailored to meet the needs of the individual and their family or caregivers. Thank you for your consideration of this matter. I respectfully request **a favorable report for HB 1117 with the amendments** proposed by MDOD.

Sincerely,

Victoria M. Rodríguez-Roldán, J.D.
Coordinator of State Autism Strategy

ATTACHMENT 1: MDOD Amendments

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 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.”