

April 1, 2026

Senate Finance Committee

Re: HB1117 – Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias Council and the Advisory Stakeholder Group on Autism-Related Needs - Recommendations for Elopement Response Devices

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Madam Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lyndsey Kuespert, and I am paraeducator at Harford Academy in Harford County. I am also the parent of a 10-year-old child with autism and epilepsy. I am writing to express strong support for House Bill 1117, which would expand access to elopement response devices for individuals who are at risk of wandering. The school I work for is highly specialized and has around 130 students ranging from age 3 to 21, all of whom have varying levels of disability. Many of our students are prone to elopement, and protocols are in place to address such a situation. However, as a parent of a child with significant needs due to autism and epilepsy, handling such an emergency is more difficult as I am usually alone with her. This means that I would have no one besides first responders, and possibly neighbors or strangers depending on where we are at the time, to assist in locating her. Drowning is not only a leading cause in children with autism, but also children with epilepsy, and we live in the Chesapeake Bay estuary. Locating a child like mine as quickly as possible is a matter of life and death, what starts as a scary moment can become a life changing tragedy within minutes. House Bill 1117 helps ensure that individuals at risk of elopement have access to critical safety technology. These devices may include wearable safety technology or monitoring systems that help caregivers and responders locate a missing individual quickly during an emergency. Elopement can occur suddenly and without warning. Individuals who wander may not understand dangers such as traffic, bodies of water, extreme weather, or getting lost. My daughter is cognitively a very young toddler, but looks like a 12-year-old. Not only will she not understand danger, but at first glance someone in passing may not recognize that she is in danger. Providing access to elopement response devices:

- Helps caregivers locate a loved one quickly if they go missing
- Improves emergency response times during search situations
- Reduces risks of injury or fatality
- Provides peace of mind for families caring for vulnerable individual.

Prevention is the first line of defense for a child who elopes, the same way the skin is our first line of defense against disease. However, you don't rely solely on your skin's ability to prevent disease, and in the same way, caregivers cannot solely rely on prevention. My entire life, including the way I arrange my home, my schedule, and my free time, my job, everything I do revolves around my daughter's care. This world is not built for her, so my job as her parent is to adapt as much as I can of the world to fit her needs and adapt her to fit where the world can't bend. Caregiving doesn't end when our kids turn 18, the responsibility for her safety and care will never transfer to her as it does with typical children as they get older. As I myself get older, and she does as well, getting bigger and stronger, my ability to structure my home around her safety will decrease. I used to be able to lock the door and her be safe, then a baby gate, then a taller baby gate screwed into the wall and another bolted into her window frame, then alarms, now its all of those things plus covers on the door knobs that as of now she hasn't figured out how to use. But she will, she always does. That will lead to another terrifying close call, a day of research and purchasing the next stage of locks and puzzles to open the doors. Being in public is its own beast to tackle, she has a stroller that's way too small and uncomfortable. That is currently our only option because the strollers cost 3-4 thousand dollars from a medical supply company. If she won't sit in the small stroller, then she walks, and I have to be hypervigilant, ready to run after her at moment's notice, cautious of everyone around us so that she doesn't freak someone out by bumping into them. She also has no concept of stranger danger and could easily be coerced to follow someone or be led away by the hand. House Bill 1117 recognizes that preventative safety tools can save lives. By improving access to elopement response technology, Maryland can better support individuals with disabilities, older adults with cognitive impairments, and the caregivers who work tirelessly to keep them safe. Raising a child with significant needs and disabilities is the loneliest thing I have ever done. Finding help, resources, respite, even equipment that could make this feel manageable is a full-time job in and of itself while many of us are working full-time and caregiving full-time already. Passing this bill would communicate to us as parents that our state does see our kids as human beings deserving of the same care and respect that all other citizens of the state deserve. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1117. Thank you for your time and consideration. Sincerely,

Lyndsey Kuespert

611 Plater St. Aberdeen, MD 21001 lyndseykuespert@gmail.com

410-349-6588