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*Legislative District 28*  
Charles County



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Ways and Means Committee

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K-12 Education

Chair, Southern Maryland  
House Delegation

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of  
HB0458 – General Provisions - Commemorative Months – Water Safety Month**

Good afternoon, Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr and Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee. For the record, I am Delegate Edith Patterson, sponsor of HB0458 - Commemorative Months – Water Safety Month.

This legislation was inspired by the tragic death of a five-year-old boy from Charles County. He was autistic and non-verbal and drowned after leaving a supervised area. After meeting with his parents and members of the Autism Community in Charles County and across Maryland, a devastating reality became clear. Drowning is the leading cause of death for children and adults with autism.

Nearly half of children with autism are at risk of wandering away from safe environments. This behavior, known as "elopement," is often paired with an attraction to water and an inability to recognize dangers. The result is an alarming number of preventable tragedies.

Last year, this General Assembly took an important step by passing and enacting Ace's Law, which requires schools to notify parents when a student elopes from a school setting. This legislation acknowledged the real and immediate risks faced by children with autism and the need for timely communication and prevention. Designating May as Water Safety Month builds on that work by expanding awareness beyond schools and into communities.

May is nationally recognized as Water Safety Month. This bill requires the Governor to proclaim May, as Water Safety Month in Maryland with a focus on saving lives through drowning prevention, education, and safe swimming practices. Communities will be encouraged to build and create activities in the month of May that will spread awareness about the fundamental importance of teaching children how to swim while also encouraging water safety.

Incidents like the one that occurred in Charles County are preventable when families and communities have better information, tools, and awareness. For these reasons, I respectfully ask for a favorable report on HB0458.

Thank you for your consideration,

Edith J. Patterson  
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