



## Government, Labor, and Elections

### House Bill 458: General Provisions – Commemorative Months – Water Safety Month

**Date: March 17, 2026**

**Position: SUPPORT**

Pathfinders for Autism (PFA) is Maryland's largest autism organization dedicated to helping individuals, parents, and professionals find resources, support, and training while working to increase awareness of autism spectrum disorders. We accomplish this through a variety of programs and services with a focus on safety, community, and resources. Our safety programs have a primary focus on the risks of wandering and elopement and include training for caregivers, training for first responders, awareness campaigns, and swimming lesson scholarships. We partner with many organizations to work collaboratively on messaging and complimentary programming to serve not only the autism community, but the broader intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) community across the state.

- **Drowning is the leading cause of death for children 1 to 4 years old**
- **Studies estimate that 49% of children with autism wander or elope, and often from a safe place.**
- **71 % of deaths related to wandering by people with autism are due to drowning.**
- **Nearly 85% of all accidental deaths among children with autism can be attributed to drowning,** according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.
- **Children with autism are 160 times more at risk of drowning** than their peers without autism.

While statistics may reflect behaviors of children, the risk is no less for autistic adults. This drowning risk does not decrease with time of year, nor size of the body of water.

HB458 would require the Governor to annually proclaim the month of May as Water Safety Month; and requiring the proclamation to urge certain activities designed to raise awareness about drowning prevention and to promote safe practices around all bodies of water.

PFA is in support of legislation that would dedicate a month to raising the awareness of the risks for drowning and highlight water safety resources in an effort to reduce water related fatalities in Maryland.

For this reason, PFA supports HB458.

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