

HB0458 – General Provisions – Commemorative Months – Water Safety Month

March 17, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE (FAV)

Elise Horne

Waldorf, Maryland

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I respectfully submit this written testimony in strong support of House Bill 458, which would require the Governor to annually proclaim the month of May as Water Safety Month in Maryland.

As the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Together We Thrive Disabilities Foundation, Inc., I serve families of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities across Southern Maryland. Through both my professional work and personal experience, I have seen firsthand the urgent need for increased awareness around water safety and drowning prevention.

In 2024, my organization stood alongside a local family in supporting and helping coordinate a Celebration of Life for a 5-year-old child with autism who tragically drowned. The loss of this young child devastated our entire Southern Maryland community. It was not just one family grieving. It was a collective heartbreak that underscored how quickly and quietly these tragedies can happen.

This was not the first time our community has experienced such loss. In 2021, we mourned the drowning of a 3-year-old girl who was in the process of being evaluated for autism. In 2023, a 10-year-old nonverbal child with autism tragically drowned in a quarry in Southern Maryland. These are not isolated incidents. They are part of a deeply concerning pattern that continues to impact families across our region.

Across the state, the urgency is equally clear. In 2024 alone, seven children with autism drowned in Maryland, prompting renewed calls for stronger awareness, improved tracking, and more comprehensive water safety initiatives.

This issue is also deeply personal for me. I am the parent of a 10-year-old child with autism who is naturally drawn to water, as many children on the autism spectrum are. Because of this, my husband and I have consistently invested in

adaptive swim lessons for our son over the years. For our family, water safety is not optional. It is essential.

House Bill 458 represents a meaningful and necessary step toward addressing this critical public health concern. By designating May as Water Safety Month, this legislation creates a consistent, statewide opportunity to:

Raise awareness about drowning prevention

Promote safe practices around pools, lakes, and other bodies of water

Encourage community-based education and outreach

While this bill does not mandate programming, it provides an important framework to elevate this issue across Maryland. It empowers organizations, schools, and communities to come together with a shared focus on prevention and safety.

For families like mine and the many families I serve, this bill is more than symbolic. It is a step toward saving lives.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 458.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elise Horne

Co-Founder and Executive Director of Together We Thrive Disabilities Foundation, Inc.