



LAILA'S GIFT
Celebrating One Gift at a Time

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House Health Committee

Re: House Bill 1117 – Elopement Response Devices – Insurance and Maryland Medical Assistance Program Coverage and Provision Under State Programs

Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Madam Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Shari Bailey, and I am the founder of Laila's Gift, a Maryland nonprofit dedicated to supporting individuals with non-apparent disabilities and the families who care for them. I am also the mother of a nonverbal daughter with autism and a rare genetic syndrome who is at risk of elopement. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 1117.

For families like mine, elopement is not simply wandering. It is a life-threatening emergency that can occur in seconds. Many children and adults with autism, dementia, and other cognitive disabilities experience elopement behaviors that place them at risk of traffic accidents, drowning, exposure, or other serious harm.

House Bill 1117 addresses a critical gap in safety planning for vulnerable individuals. The bill would require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and certain health insurers to provide coverage for approved elopement response devices and associated supports when medically necessary. These devices may include wearable location-enabled technology, door and window sensors, and alerting systems that help caregivers and responders locate or respond to a missing individual quickly.

For many families, these technologies are the difference between **minutes and tragedy**. Yet the cost of these devices and their associated services can make them inaccessible for families already managing significant caregiving expenses.

House Bill 1117 recognizes that these technologies are not luxury items. They are **assistive safety tools**, and the bill appropriately allows them to be treated as durable medical equipment or assistive technology within existing health programs.



By ensuring coverage, this legislation will:

- Improve emergency response outcomes when an individual elopes
- Provide caregivers with essential safety planning tools
- Reduce the burden on first responders during search and response efforts
- Prevent injuries and fatalities among vulnerable Marylanders

Elopement is a reality faced by thousands of families across the lifespan. Children with autism, adults with intellectual disabilities, and older adults living with dementia are all at risk. Maryland has an opportunity to lead the nation in recognizing that **preventative safety technology saves lives**.

House Bill 1117 is one of five bills included in The LEAD Act, a comprehensive initiative designed to strengthen Maryland's preparedness and coordination when elopement incidents occur. Together, these measures aim to ensure that families, schools, healthcare providers, and first responders have the access, coordination, and training needed to respond quickly and effectively when a vulnerable individual goes missing.

As both a mother and an advocate, I know firsthand how terrifying it is to lose sight of a loved one who cannot communicate their location, name, address, or danger. Caregivers should not have to choose between their loved one's safety and their ability to afford the technology that protects them.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to give **House Bill 1117 a favorable report**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,



Shari Bailey
Founder, CEO, Caregiver
Laila's Gift