



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 1117: Elopement Response Devices - Insurance and Maryland Medical Assistance Program Coverage and Provision Under State Programs

Summary: House Bill 1117 ensures that Maryland residents living with autism, Alzheimer's disease, or related dementias can access life-saving elopement response devices through their health insurance when medically necessary. These devices, often GPS-enabled, allow caregivers and first responders to quickly locate individuals who wander from safe environments, a common and dangerous occurrence in both the autism and dementia communities. By requiring coverage for approved devices and their associated supports, this bill provides families with a critical safety tool, reduces emergency response times, and helps protect vulnerable individuals while supporting the first responders who work to bring them home safely.

Background: Wandering, often called elopement, occurs when a person leaves a safe area or caregiver supervision and becomes lost or disoriented. This behavior is particularly common among individuals with autism and those living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias. [According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), about half of children and youth with autism spectrum disorder have been reported to wander from a safe environment at some point, sometimes quickly and even under close supervision. When this happens, families are often left searching desperately for their loved one while they face immediate risks such as a traffic injury or drowning.

For many families, the threat of wandering is constant. [Research indicates that nearly half of children with autism attempt to wander after age four](#), and roughly one in four incidents results in the child being missing long enough to cause significant concern. Wandering behavior is also common among individuals with dementia; [studies estimate that around 60% of people with dementia will wander at least once](#), and when they become lost the consequences can be severe.

The risks associated with elopement are profound. [Drowning is the leading cause of death for children with autism following wandering episodes](#), and the risk of drowning can be dramatically higher than for other children. In many cases, individuals who wander may not recognize danger or may be unable to communicate their name, address, or recognize that they need help. This creates significant danger not only for the individual but also for families, caregivers, and the broader community when search efforts must be mobilized.



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[These situations frequently require rapid responses from local law enforcement, fire departments, and emergency personnel.](#) In fact, many missing-person incidents involving individuals with autism or dementia begin at home and require coordinated searches of neighborhoods, parks, roads, and nearby waterways. For families and first responders alike, every minute matters.

Bill Overview: House Bill 1117 addresses this challenge by ensuring that individuals who are medically determined to be at risk of elopement can access approved elopement response devices through their health insurance coverage.

These devices often use GPS or similar technology to help caregivers and authorized responders quickly locate a missing person. When a wandering incident occurs, the ability to identify an individual's real-time location can dramatically reduce the time required to conduct search operations and can significantly increase the likelihood of a safe recovery. [Research indicates that location tracking technologies can substantially reduce search time and improve outcomes](#) when individuals wander from safe environments.

For families caring for a loved one with autism or dementia, these devices provide an additional layer of protection while preserving dignity and independence. Parents of children with autism often describe the challenge of maintaining constant supervision while still allowing their children to learn, play, and participate in community life. Similarly, caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's disease face the difficult balance between safety and independence for loved ones who may become disoriented and wander.

GPS-enabled response devices help bridge that gap. They allow families to respond quickly if someone leaves a safe environment and allow first responders to begin searches with crucial location information rather than starting from a place where the individual was last seen. In many cases, this technology can transform a potentially life-threatening search into a rapid and safe recovery.

By requiring insurance coverage for medically necessary elopement response devices and the supports needed to operate them, HB 1117 removes a significant barrier for families. Many of these devices require ongoing monitoring services or specialized equipment that can be costly for caregivers already managing significant medical and caregiving expenses. This bill ensures that access to life-saving technology does not depend on a family's financial resources.



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Just as importantly, HB 1117 supports public safety. When an individual goes missing due to elopement, local emergency responders must often deploy substantial resources to locate the person quickly. GPS-enabled devices can dramatically narrow search areas and provide real-time location information, helping first responders focus their efforts and improving the chances of a safe recovery.

Conclusion: Wandering or elopement is one of the most dangerous and distressing challenges faced by families caring for individuals with autism, Alzheimer’s disease, and related dementia’s. In a matter of seconds, a loved one can leave a safe environment and face life-threatening risks from traffic accidents, injury, or drowning. Families and first responders across Maryland understand the urgency of these situations.

House Bill 1117 provides a practical, evidence-based solution. By ensuring insurance coverage for medically necessary elopement response devices, this bill equips families with tools that can save lives, reduce emergency response time, and provide peace of mind to caregivers across the state. It is a commonsense measure that supports vulnerable Marylanders, their families, and the public safety professionals who work tirelessly to protect them.

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