



Judicial Proceedings

Senate Bill 745: Police Training – Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026)

Date: February 24, 2026

Position: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT**

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.

Together with our advocacy partners, including The Arc Maryland, Autism Society of Maryland, the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, and the Hussman Institute for Autism, PFA is writing in support of SB745 with the following amendments:

- Page 2, line 7: (v) Training regarding individuals with dementia, and intellectual and developmental disabilities, including autism, including training for:...

SB745 would require entrance-level police training, and as determined by the Commission, in-service training regarding individuals with dementia and autism, including training for locating an individual who is wandering, eloping, or otherwise missing; searching near bodies of water; sensory-aware approaches; reunification; documentation; and interagency coordination.

While the LEAD act seeks to enhance law enforcement training on wandering and elopement, it may inadvertently exclude the broader IDD community, covered by the current training objectives, who are also at risk for wandering and elopement. According to

the NIH, 26.7% of children with an intellectual/developmental disability elope, while 49% of children with autism elope, and often from a safe environment.

PFA and our partners are in support of enhancing training that is currently mandated for understanding individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), including autism. The Maryland Police & Correctional Training Commissions (MPCTC) works closely with community stakeholders, including the Ethan Saylor Alliance, to define training objectives. Under the current Comparative Compliance and Entry Level objectives, 9.06.07 states “Identify search and rescue considerations when a person with a disability has wandered away from a home or facility.”

The inclusion of intellectual and developmental disabilities ensures that the topics included in item (v) 1-6 are applied to the entire IDD community who are all at increased risk for wandering and elopement. For this reason, PFA and the below signed support SB745 If amended.

Rebecca Rienzi, Pathfinders for Autism
Elizabeth Benevides, Hussman Institute for Autism
Ande Kolp, The Arc Maryland
Rachel London, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council
Melissa Rosenberg, Autism Society Maryland