

# **Support Letter SB 745 Police Training.pdf**

Uploaded by: April Seitz

Position: FAV

April Seitz  
307 Wyndham Circle  
Unit A  
Owings Mills, MD 21117

February 18,

2026

Maryland Senate  
Judicial Proceedings Committee

Re: Senate Bill 745, *Police Training - Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026)*

The Honorable Chairperson of MD Senate Judicial Proceedings  
Committee:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 745, *Training - Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026)*. As more Maryland families are caring for children and/or aging family members with autism or dementia, the need for awareness and support from our police is greatly needed.

Family caregivers caring for their loved ones with autism or dementia at home, often rely on the assistance of police as first responders to a behavioral crisis such as wandering, getting lost, etc.. In such situations, these families need to be confident that when they call upon the police for help, the police will have the knowledge and awareness to respond appropriately to children, the aged, and other vulnerable individuals with autism or dementia.

Passage of this bill would be greatly appreciated by the many family caregivers of our Maryland community. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

April Seitz

# **SB 745 - Police Training Autism and Dementia - FAV**

Uploaded by: Dorinda Adams

Position: FAV



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1-866-542-8163 | Fax: 410-837-0269  
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facebook.com/aarpmd

**SB 745 – Police Training – Autism and Dementia  
(LEAD Act of 2026)  
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
February 24, 2026  
FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon, Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 745, the LEAD Act of 2026. We thank Senator McKay for introducing this important legislation.

My name is Dorinda Adams. I am a member of the AARP Maryland Executive Council and a volunteer on the advocacy team. AARP Maryland has worked in close coordination with Laila's Gift and others to help in the development of LEAD Act of 2026.

AARP Maryland is one of the largest membership-based organizations in the state, with approximately 850,000 members. We represent the interests of Maryland's over 50 population and bring the lived experiences, concerns, and priorities of our members to the discussion table, ensuring that policy decisions reflect the needs of older adults.

**Why AARP Maryland Supports SB 745**

SB 745 requires the Maryland Police and Training Standards Commission to require entrance-level and in-service police training to include training regarding individuals with autism and dementia who are prone to wander, also called elopement. This issue is near and dear to my heart because my father lived with dementia was prone to wander. This led to a lot of concern for his safety.

Current training requirements address individuals with physical, intellectual, developmental, and psychiatric disabilities. Expanding the training to address elopement, wandering, or missing individuals living with autism or dementia is important, as the data demonstrates that these populations are at risk for wandering or eloping.

National data indicates that 60 percent of individuals living with Alzheimer's dementia or other forms of dementia will elope at least once during the course the disease. The Maryland Department of Health's Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias Prevalence Data Report from November 2025 identified that 148,470 (15%) individuals aged 65 and older living in Maryland have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia. If we consider these two pieces of information, it is evident that Maryland has an estimated 89,000 individuals living with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia who are likely to wander or elope at least once.

That figure, 89,000, is just the first part of the equation, as we know each one of these individuals has family, friends, and other members of their communities who are impacted by the risks of elopement. We also know that first responders are impacted as well, as they want the best outcomes for a vulnerable individual but may not be trained on how best to address the complexities of supporting an individual living with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia.

SB 745 is a step in providing first responders with specific training to address elopement, across the lifespan, especially for those living with autism and dementia as well as individuals with cognitive impairment.

### **Conclusion**

We believe that by passing SB 745, Maryland will lead the country in ensuring that first responders are trained to support a favorable, often life-saving outcome of addressing elopement in individuals at risk of wandering.

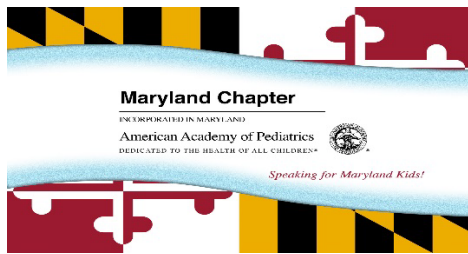
For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 745.

If you have any questions, please contact Sara Westrick, AARP Maryland Advocacy Director, at [swestrick@aarp.org](mailto:swestrick@aarp.org) or by calling 410-310-0374.

# **SB745**

Uploaded by: Emily Benson

Position: FAV



Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
February 24, 2026  
Senate Bill 745 – *Police Training – Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026)*  
**POSITION: SUPPORT**

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of strong **support** for Senate Bill 745. This legislation requires specialized training for law enforcement officers and first responders on interacting safely and effectively with individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and dementia. MDAAP suggests the following amendment to include individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities:

- Page 2, line 9 – 10: (v) Training regarding individuals with dementia, AND INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, INCLUDING autism, including training for: ...

As pediatricians, we are acutely aware that children and youth with developmental disabilities face unique safety vulnerabilities, none more urgent than the risks associated with wandering and elopement. These episodes can escalate rapidly and often require immediate, coordinated emergency response. Ensuring that our first responders have the training they need is both a public health imperative and a moral responsibility.

National data shows that approximately 49% of children with autism wander or elope from a safe environment and children with intellectual disabilities (ID) are also at elevated risk. In Maryland, the consequences of wandering have been devastating and in 2024 alone, seven children with autism drowned in our state. [\[wmar2news.com\]](http://wmar2news.com) These tragedies illustrate precisely why first responders must be equipped with specialized training in sensory-aware approaches, search and rescue considerations, communication strategies, and risk mitigation tailored to individuals with ASD, ID, and dementia.

This bill strengthens Maryland’s commitment to protecting vulnerable residents by ensuring that first responders receive standardized, evidence-informed training in:

- Recognizing and responding to wandering/elopement events.
- Understanding sensory, communication, and behavioral needs.

- Employing de-escalation strategies appropriate for neurodivergent individuals.
- Conducting searches near high-risk areas, such as bodies of water.
- Coordinating with caregivers and healthcare providers.

These training elements align with best practices recommended by national disability and safety organizations and are consistent with current public health guidance. Our Chapter fully supports Maryland's efforts to enhance first responder training. This legislation will:

- Improve outcomes in critical missing child situations.
- Reduce preventable injuries and deaths.
- Strengthen trust between families and public safety agencies.
- Promote statewide consistency in first responder preparedness.

We applaud the General Assembly for prioritizing the safety of individuals with autism, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and dementia. The evidence is clear; Maryland must ensure that first responders have the tools and training to respond effectively. For these reasons, the **MDAAP** urges a **FAVORABLE** report.

**For more information call:**

Christine K. Krone  
J. Steven Wise  
Danna L. Kauffman  
Andrew G. Vetter  
410-244-7000

# **NASW Maryland - 2026 SB 745 FAV - LEAD Act of 2026**

Uploaded by: Karessa Proctor

Position: FAV



**Testimony Before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
February 24, 2026**

**Senate Bill 745 - Police Training - Autism and Dementia  
LEAD Act of 2026**

**Support**

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Committee on Aging, we would like to express our strong support for Senate Bill 745: Police Training – Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026).

As social workers dedicated to the well-being of Marylanders across the lifespan, we recognize that standardized training for first responders is a necessary tool for ensuring the safety and dignity of individuals with neurodivergent conditions and cognitive impairments.

Maryland is currently facing a significant public health challenge regarding cognitive health and safety. The need for the training mandated by SB 745 is underscored by the following data:

- **Growing Vulnerable Population:** An estimated 130,000 Marylanders are currently living with Alzheimer's, a number that has grown steadily and is projected to continue increasing.
- **High Incidence of Wandering:** Research indicates that six out of ten individuals living with Alzheimer's will wander or elope at some point during the progression of the disease.
- **Fatality Risks:** Elopement incidents are dangerous; nearly 17% of elopements for individuals with autism end in fatality, with 91% of those deaths resulting from drowning.

SB 745 strengthens our state's response by equipping law enforcement, firefighters, and EMTs with autism- and dementia-informed rescue and recovery considerations. From a social work perspective, this legislation is vital because:

- **Standardizes Compassionate Care:** It ensures a "same playbook" approach, moving from localized, varied responses to a consistent, statewide standard of care.
- **Supports the Caregiver Network:** Maryland family caregivers provide over 360 million hours of unpaid care annually. Standardized first-responder training reduces the trauma and burnout these families face during a crisis by improving communication and response times.
- **Trauma-Informed Response:** By focusing on risk recognition and communication, first responders can mitigate the trauma associated with search-and-rescue emergencies for non-verbal or disoriented individuals.

(over)



The LEAD Act provides a comprehensive framework—Access, Coordination, and Training—that protects our most vulnerable citizens while supporting the professional caregivers and first responders who serve them.

We urge you to give a favorable report on SB 745.

Respectfully,

Karessa Proctor, BSW, MSW  
Executive Director, NASW-MD

# **FAVORABLE\_Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 745\_**

Uploaded by: Linwood Alston

Position: FAV

## **FAVORABLE**

### **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 0745 – (LEAD Act of 2026)**

Good afternoon, Chairman, Vice Chair, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am Chief Linwood C. Alston, Chief of Police for the City of New Carrollton and a former Commissioner on the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission.

I am here in strong support of Senate Bill 0745 -the LEAD Act of 2026.

This bill ensures that Maryland law enforcement officers receive specific training regarding individuals with dementia and autism particularly in situations involving wandering, elopement, and missing persons.

From a law enforcement perspective, these are not routine calls.

They are high-risk, time-sensitive emergencies.

Individuals with autism who elope are often drawn to water.

Individuals with dementia may become disoriented within blocks of their homes, wander into traffic, or appear uncooperative when they are simply confused.

Without proper training, those behaviors can be misinterpreted.

Misinterpretation can lead to escalation.

Escalation can lead to tragedy.

The LEAD Act ensures officers are trained in:

- Locating individuals who are wandering or missing
- Searching near bodies of water
- Sensory-aware approaches
- Reunification
- Proper documentation
- Interagency coordination

This is practical, operational training that saves lives.

But I also stand before you today not just as a police chief but as a son.

My mother is currently facing the realities of dementia.

I have seen how quickly confusion can set in. How someone who once guided you through life can suddenly become unsure of where they are.

If she were ever to wander, I would want the responding officers to understand that she is not resisting, not defiant she is afraid and confused.

Training transforms reaction into compassion.

Training transforms uncertainty into skill.

Training saves lives.

Maryland has led the nation in modern policing reforms and training standards. The LEAD Act continues that leadership by preparing officers for encounters that require patience, awareness, and coordination.

This bill protects vulnerable individuals, supports families, and equips officers with the tools they need to respond safely and effectively.

As a Chief of Police, I support it.

As a former Commissioner, I support it.

As a son, I thank you for considering it.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 0745.

Thank you for your time.

Chief Linwood C. Alston

Chief of Police

City of New Carrollton Police Department

6016 Princess Garden Parkway

New Carrollton. MD 20784

[Lalston@newcarrolltonmd.gov](mailto:Lalston@newcarrolltonmd.gov)

(240) 508-2112

# **SB 745 - FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Megan Peters

Position: FAV



# *Maryland Senior Citizens Action Network*

## **MSCAN**

*AARP Maryland*

*Baltimore Jewish  
Council*

*Catholic Charities of  
Baltimore*

*Central Maryland  
Ecumenical Council*

*Church of the Brethren*

*Episcopal Diocese of  
Maryland*

*Housing Opportunities  
Commission of  
Montgomery County*

*Lutheran Office on  
Public Policy in  
Maryland*

*Maryland Association of  
Area Agencies on Aging*

*Maryland Catholic  
Conference*

*Mental Health  
Association of Maryland*

*Mid-Atlantic LifeSpan*

*National Association of  
Social Workers,  
Maryland Chapter*

*Presbytery of Baltimore*

*The Coordinating  
Center*

*MSCAN Co-Chairs:  
Carol Lienhard  
Megan Peters  
410-921-9005*

The Maryland Senior Citizens Action Network (MSCAN) is a statewide coalition of advocacy groups, service providers, faith-based and mission-driven organizations that support policies that meet the housing, health, and quality of care needs of Maryland's low and moderate-income seniors.

**MSCAN supports SB 745.** SB 745 requires the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to incorporate training on interacting with individuals with dementia and autism into both entrance-level and in-service police instruction. This includes education on best practices for locating and responding to individuals who wander, elope, or are otherwise missing, ensuring that officers are prepared to respond safely and effectively in these situations.

As Maryland's population ages, more older adults are living with dementia, cognitive impairment, or related conditions that can affect communication, behavior, and responses during stressful or unfamiliar encounters. Wandering is a common and serious safety concern for these individuals, and untrained responses can unintentionally escalate situations or delay reunification. Providing officers with the tools to recognize signs of cognitive impairment and to respond with appropriate communication and de-escalation strategies enhances safety for both residents and first responders.

SB 745 will help prevent avoidable tragedies, reduce unnecessary criminal justice involvement, and create safer, more informed interactions between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Integrating dementia-informed and autism-informed approaches into statewide training standards strengthens Maryland's commitment to public safety while supporting older adults, caregivers, and individuals with developmental disabilities.

For these reasons, MSCAN urges a favorable report for SB 745.

# **SB745.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: Melody Hession

Position: FAV



**Delaware-Maryland Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

Testimony Prepared for the  
Judicial Proceedings Committee  
on  
**Senate Bill 0745**  
February 20, 2026  
Position: Favorable

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Reverend Melody Hession-Sigmon, assistant to the bishop for public policy in the Delaware-Maryland Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a faith community with congregations in every part of the state.

A behavioral episode shouldn't be a death sentence, but that is exactly what it was for Victor Perez, a seventeen-year-old autistic, non-speaking person with cerebral palsy who was shot and killed in his family's own yard in Idaho last year. Perez was outside with his family when he got upset, grabbed a knife, and began stumbling around the yard, which is what prompted neighbors to call 911. The police who arrived on the scene apparently had no training to recognize that it was Perez's disability that was preventing him from walking properly as he was crawling on the ground inside the fenced enclosure of his yard, so they fired 14 shots within 12 to 16 seconds of arriving.

In 2010, the ELCA published in its social message on people living with disabilities that, "all people deserve equal protection under the law. This protection includes... protection from violence, intimidation, and neglect at home, school, and in all other settings, public or private." The hard truth is that autistic people and people with other intellectual, developmental and neurological disabilities can be prone to behaviors like wandering and eloping (running away), and in these vulnerable moments they may come into contact with law enforcement. Specialized training for law enforcement can help transform these interactions, save lives, and build trust in the community.

We believe that the actions of *all* people require interdependence. Perceptions and illusions of independence equate an idealized and unreasonable human perfection with being "normal." We of the ELCA believe that God designed us *all* to depend greatly upon each other. We *all* live in the world with others who think and act



**Delaware-Maryland Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

differently. We must depend upon others in collaboration around problem-solving or even in the ordinary tasks of sharing a highway or fulfilling our relational and spiritual needs. And we are all equally made in the image of God.

We believe that law enforcement training to work with people with the disabilities recognized in **SB0745** will not only keep vulnerable people safer, but will contribute a positive shift towards more life-affirming practices in the duties of our local law enforcement to serve and protect all Marylanders.

We urge a favorable report.

Reverend Melody Hession-Sigmon

# **SB 745 - Written Testimony - JPR.pdf**

Uploaded by: Mike McKay

Position: FAV

**MIKE MCKAY**  
*Legislative District 1*  
Garrett, Allegany, and Washington Counties



**THE SENATE OF MARYLAND**  
**ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401**

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*Cumberland Office*  
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240-362-7040

*Williamsport Office*  
2N Conococheque Street  
Williamsport Town Hall  
Williamsport, Maryland

*Joint Committees*  
Administrative, Executive,  
and Legislative Review  
Children, Youth, and Families  
Program Open Space and Agricultural  
Land Preservation

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

February 24, 2026

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express strong support for Senate Bill 745, the Law Enforcement Autism and Dementia (LEAD) Act of 2026. This legislation takes an important step toward ensuring that Maryland's law enforcement officers are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to interact safely and effectively with individuals living with dementia and autism. By requiring the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to incorporate specialized training into both entrance-level and in-service programs, SB 745 addresses a critical gap in public safety. These provisions will help officers respond with sensitivity and competence in situations involving wandering, elopement, or missing persons, which are common and high-risk scenarios for these vulnerable populations.

The LEAD Act also emphasizes practical strategies such as sensory-aware approaches, reunification procedures, documentation, and interagency coordination. These measures not only protect individuals with dementia and autism but also enhance community trust and reduce the likelihood of tragic outcomes. Maryland has long been a leader in promoting inclusive and compassionate policing, and SB 745 continues that tradition by prioritizing training that reflects the diverse needs of our residents. I urge the committee to give this bill a favorable report and help ensure that our law enforcement officers are prepared to serve all Marylanders with dignity and care.

I thank you for your time and I urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Mike McKay'.

Senator Mike McKay  
Representing the Appalachia Region of Maryland  
Serving Garrett, Allegany, and Washington Counties

# **Sponsor Amendment**

Uploaded by: Mike McKay

Position: FAV



**SB0745/583624/1**

AMENDMENTS  
PREPARED  
BY THE  
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE  
SERVICES

23 FEB 26  
10:08:03

BY: Senator McKay

(To be offered in the Judicial Proceedings Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 745

(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, in line 6, after “with” insert “intellectual and developmental disabilities,”; and in the same line, after “dementia” insert a comma.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 2, in lines 5 and 6, strike “, intellectual, developmental,”; in line 7, after “WITH” insert “INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES,”; and in the same line, after “**DEMENTIA**” insert a comma.

# **Sponsor Amendment Reprint**

Uploaded by: Mike McKay

Position: FAV

# SENATE BILL 745

E4

6lr3115  
CF HB 634

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By: **Senator McKay**  
Introduced and read first time: February 6, 2026  
Assigned to: Judicial Proceedings

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A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Police Training – Autism and Dementia**  
3 **(LEAD Act of 2026)**

4 FOR the purpose of requiring the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to  
5 require entrance–level and in–service police training to include certain training  
6 regarding individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, dementia, and  
7 autism; and generally relating to police training.

8 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,  
9 Article – Public Safety  
10 Section 3–207(a)(16)  
11 Annotated Code of Maryland  
12 (2022 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

13 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
14 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

15 **Article – Public Safety**

16 3–207.

17 (a) The Commission has the following powers and duties:

18 (16) to require, for entrance–level police training and, as determined by the  
19 Commission, for in–service level training conducted by the State and each county and  
20 municipal police training school, that the curriculum and minimum courses of study  
21 include, consistent with established law enforcement standards and federal and State  
22 constitutional provisions:

23 (i) training in lifesaving techniques, including Cardiopulmonary  
24 Resuscitation (CPR);

2 REPRINT OF SENATE BILL 745 as amended by SB0745/583624/1 02/23/26 at 10:07 AM

1 (ii) training in the proper level and use of force as set forth in the  
2 Maryland Use of Force Statute under § 3–524 of this title;

3 (iii) training regarding sensitivity to cultural and gender diversity;  
4 [and]

5 (iv) training regarding individuals with physical, ~~intellectual,~~  
6 ~~developmental,~~ and psychiatric disabilities; AND

7 (V) TRAINING REGARDING INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL  
8 DISABILITIES, DEMENTIA, AND  
9 AUTISM, INCLUDING TRAINING FOR:

9 1. LOCATING AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS WANDERING,  
10 ELOPING, OR OTHERWISE MISSING;

11 2. SEARCHING NEAR BODIES OF WATER;

12 3. SENSORY-AWARE APPROACHES;

13 4. REUNIFICATION;

14 5. DOCUMENTATION; AND

15 6. INTERAGENCY COORDINATION;

16 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect  
17 October 1, 2026.

**SB745- LEAD Act- FAV NAMI.pdf**

Uploaded by: Morgan Mills

Position: FAV

February 24, 2026

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and distinguished members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 60,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses, their families, and the wider community.

NAMI Maryland is dedicated to building better lives for Marylanders affected by mental illness. A core pillar of our mission is minimizing justice-system response to people with mental illness while ensuring that any unavoidable interactions preserve the health, well-being, and dignity of the individual.

SB745 helps achieve these goals by requiring the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to offer specialized training regarding individuals with dementia and autism. This legislation is a critical step forward because it promotes de-escalation and re-unification.

By adding specific training for interactions with individuals with dementia, we are ensuring that our State law enforcement officers are equipped to handle the nuance of this condition. In equipping officers with the tools they need to recognize and respond appropriately to these vulnerable populations, Maryland can reduce the risk of tragic encounters.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

Stephanie Slowly-Little  
Executive Director  
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland

**Contact:** Morgan Mills-DiEnno  
Compass Government Relations  
Mmills@compassadvocacy.com

# **SB0745-LWVMD-FAV- Police Training- Autism and Deme**

Uploaded by: Nora Miller Smith

Position: FAV



**TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE**

**SB0745: Police Training- Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026)**

**POSITION: Support**

**BY: Linda Kohn, President**

**DATE: February 24, 2026**

**The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports Senate Bill 745, which would require law enforcement officers to undergo training in how to more safely and effectively assist individuals with autism and dementia in crisis situations.**

The League supports policing practices that promote safety for both law enforcement officers and the communities they serve, and that train police to identify individuals with mental health conditions or disabilities, so that officers will request support from appropriate medical and mental health professionals.

The police training required by SB 745 will help officers better recognize and react appropriately to the needs of people with autism and dementia who are in crisis. They will learn how to de-escalate situations that could potentially lead to harm, and how to best coordinate with other agencies to urgently locate and rescue individuals who had wandered or eloped.

Nearly half of children with autism have eloped at least once.<sup>1</sup> This significantly increases their risks of severe injury or death, particularly from drowning or traffic accidents. And about 60 percent of individuals with dementia have a history of wandering, often repeatedly.<sup>2</sup>

**Mandatory training will help police officers better assist highly vulnerable individuals in hazardous situations who may be confused, non-verbal, unaware of dangers, or unable to respond appropriately to questions or commands. This training will lead to better crisis management, and will help save lives. The League of Women Voters of Maryland and its 2,000 members urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 745.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kennedykrieger.org/stories/nearly-half-children-autism-wander-or-bolt-safe-places#:~:text=49%20percent%20of%20children%20with,1%20percent%20of%20unaffected%20siblings.>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/stages-behaviors/wandering>

**RA Lawson Testimony SB 745.pdf**

Uploaded by: Reginald A. Lawson

Position: FAV

# Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 745 - LEAD Act of 2026

Chairman, Vice Chair, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Great Afternoon. I am Reginald A. Lawson, an honored former caregiver for my late mother, a Caregiver Author (At Home with Dementia), Founder and Facilitator of A Gathering of Caregiving Men monthly support sessions, Certified First Responder Dementia Engagement Trainer.

I stand convicted in my support of Senate Bill 745 - The LEAD Act of 2026

This bill enhances our First Responders understandings and skills to effectively engage Autism and Dementia sufferers in the critical moments of elopement.

Elopement does not happen because of careless oversight by the caregivers. Sometimes our early-stage dementia elopers go out for a couple of minutes and return on their own. However, as they progress into mid-to-late stages of dementia's lifespan, their demented mind robs them of the ability to return.

My mother averaged six elopements a month. We only reported the elopement once in two years. She often would be standing in her front yard or at the corner, just thirty feet from her front door, unaware of where she lived. Neighbors would bring her home, startled by her attempt to open the door and come into their homes, thinking it was hers.

Elopement, the intent and actualization, is a psychological and spiritual need to run towards or from things. Our discussion during our Male Caregivers Sessions frequently reveal elopement attempts due to illogical desires or needs, such as:

- Attending a funeral that does not exist
- Visiting a non-existing hospitalized friend
- Escaping a threat in the home from strangers (family members or themselves)
- Seeking safety as a child would in a scary unfamiliar world (they want to go home)
- A need to clean the sidewalk or street
- Acting with integrity to arrive on-time for work (when they no longer are working)

Our world turns dark and frightening when elopement happens. Some of us become paralyzed and sickened with fear, and others of us become psychotic with doubt, guilt and anger assuming the worst. We dread the ring of the phone, knock at the door or arrival of a patrol vehicle.

Our trust in First Responders is at its highest and becomes our beacon of hope in our darkest moment. Finding our vulnerable loved-ones is one thing. However, how they are engaged by the First Responders, in the first critical few seconds, will determine positive (returned safe and uninjured) or negative (injured or killed) outcomes. We desperately need, when we make that call, for our willing and dedicated First Responders to be confident and enlightened on how to best achieve rescue over recovery.

The enactment of this bill strengthens our loved-ones chances for a safe return, the hope and trust of our caregivers, families and communities, and honors First Responders abilities to succeed in their mission and commitment to serve and protect.

I respectfully urge your favorable position on Senate Bill 745.

Humbly.

# **Testimony in support of SB0745 - LEAD Act of 2026.**

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0745 RichardKaplowitz\_FAV

02/24/2026

Richard Keith Kaplowitz  
Frederick, MD 21703

**TESTIMONY ON SB#/0745- POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**Police Training - Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026)**

**TO:** Chair Smith, Jr., Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#/0745, **Police Training - Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026)**

Psychology Today Magazine's opinion is *Autism and Policing: A Call for Awareness - Autistic individuals deserve safety, not suspicion, from police.*<sup>1</sup>

- Police responders to crisis calls in the community need to be more knowledgeable about autism.
- Behavioral crises of people with autism in the community are different from other domestic emergencies.
- Emergency dispatchers can gather information that might reduce the use of lethal force by responding officers.

In Maryland, police interactions with individuals with autism or dementia face critical challenges, including misinterpretation of behaviors (e.g., lack of eye contact, repetitive movement) as defiant, leading to unnecessary force, distress, or injury. Key issues include communication barriers, sensory sensitivity, and a lack of specialized training, often resulting in harmful outcomes rather than necessary assistance.<sup>2</sup>

Among the new training required regarding individuals with dementia and autism will be 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

This bill will require the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to require entrance-level and in-service police training to include certain training regarding individuals with dementia and autism.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return an favorable report on SB#/0745.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/psychiatrys-think-tank/202506/autism-and-policing-a-call-for-awareness#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20some%20individuals%20with,violent%20confrontation%20and%20lethal%20force.>

<sup>2</sup> Google AI Search "Problems in police interactions with Autism and Dementia individuals in Maryland"

**Lailas Gift SB 745.pdf**

Uploaded by: Shari Bailey

Position: FAV



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**February 24, 2026**

**Senate Judiciary Committee**

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

**Position:** Support

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Shari Bailey, Founder and CEO of Laila's Gift. I write in strong support of SB 745, a key pillar of The LEAD Act — legislation our organization proudly championed and helped develop. I am not only an advocate. I am a mother and caregiver.

My daughter Laila was born with a rare syndrome and is also diagnosed with autism and is nonverbal. The first time she eloped, I experienced a fear no parent should ever have to feel — the terrifying realization that your child is missing and unable to communicate danger, location, or distress. Elopement happens silently and quickly. And too often, it ends tragically.

Research shows that nearly half of children with autism will wander at some point. Many are drawn to water or traffic. Drowning remains one of the leading causes of death for children with autism who elope. For individuals living with dementia, elopement is also common and can result in injury, exposure, or death if not located quickly.

I share this not only as a mother of a child with special needs, but also as someone in the sandwich generation — raising a child with complex needs while supporting aging in-laws navigating dementia. Elopement is not confined to one age group. It is a lifespan issue affecting families across Maryland every single day.

SB 745 strengthens training for first responders and public safety professionals so they are better prepared to recognize, understand, and safely respond to individuals with autism, dementia, intellectual disabilities, and other cognitive conditions. This bill does not suggest inadequacy in current systems. Instead, it enhances awareness and equips responders with tools specific to wandering behaviors, sensory differences, communication barriers, and reunification best practices.



When someone goes missing, time is everything. Training saves time. Training saves lives.

As the champion organization behind this legislation, Laila's Gift has worked to ensure this proposal reflects lived experience, caregiver input, and practical implementation. We believe Maryland can lead the nation in building a response system that protects both children and adults with hidden disabilities.

For these reasons, Laila's Gift respectfully urges the Committee to issue a **Favorable Report on SB 745**.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

It's Time to LEAD.

Warm regards,



Shari Bailey  
Founder, CEO, Caregiver  
Laila's Gift

**SB0745 Lead ACT FINAL .pdf**

Uploaded by: Rebecca Rienzi

Position: FWA



## 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