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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB311-PUBLIC SCHOOLS-INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES-ACCESSIBILITY AND EMERGENCY PLANNING

HEARING DATE 2/11/2026 WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 311 with friendly amendments.

Ensuring that students and staff have equal access to vacate the school building at the time of an emergency is imperative to students, staff and visitors with physical disabilities. Still today, many districts in Maryland are leaving people with disabilities on stairwell landings during fire drills, real fires and other emergencies so EMS can find them. Imagine, being physically disabled, temporary or permanent, and being left behind when all of your peers and teachers are leaving you behind. This happened to my daughter in a Howard County middle school in 2016. A bill was passed during that legislative session to ensure schools provide an accommodation. Unfortunately, recent MPIAs show that many districts are still using stairwell landing as the area of refuge for EMS to find them. This is not the “accommodation” people with disabilities need. They must be evacuated with their peers, not left behind. This bill will ask the MD Center for School Safety to gather data on instances when a school became inaccessible for a student with a disability in a manner that could impede evacuation. Additionally, I am asking for friendly amendments to include MCSS to collect data annually on:

*the number of schools that have and are actually

* instances of fires or emergencies in schools where an individual with physical disabilities had difficulty accessing an exit due to stairs or steps.

*the number of single point of entry doors that do not have an ADA compliant electronic switch

The switch is necessary to open the single point of access doors to each school so people with wheelchairs, crutches or other walking devices can access the same entrance as their peers. Many main entrance doors to schools are still not ADA compliant. This data will help us to determine need for future funding.

Pls support these friendly amendments and pass this bill to ensure safety, access and ensure data is collected to provide the general assembly information for future funding of evacuation devices and ADA complaint doors.

