



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Ways and Means Committee – Sponsor Testimony: Delegate Aaron Kaufman

HB0311 - Individuals With Disabilities - Accessibility and Emergency Planning

Hearing Date: 2/11/26 at 2:00 p.m.

Good afternoon, Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark and esteemed colleagues. I am Delegate Aaron Kaufman and I am requesting a favorable report on HB0311 - Individuals With Disabilities - Accessibility and Emergency Planning.

This legislation is grounded in a simple but critical principle: emergency preparedness must work for every student. For students with disabilities, particularly those with mobility or communication needs, accessibility during an emergency is essential to their safety.

This bill was inspired by the advocacy of Lori Scott, a Maryland parent who brought this issue forward after learning that her daughter, who is nonverbal and uses a wheelchair, was left alone in a stairwell when a fire alarm went off at her school and the building was evacuated. While others exited the building, her daughter was left behind.

Fortunately, no one was harmed, but the incident revealed a serious gap in emergency planning that this bill seeks to prevent.



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The legislation strengthens existing school safety practices by requiring each local school system to identify accessibility issues for individuals with disabilities as part of its regular safety evaluations. The intent is proactive planning, ensuring that barriers are identified and addressed before an emergency occurs, not discovered in the middle of one. As part of this safety-focused approach, the bill encourages attention to practical, real-world conditions that affect emergency response, such as access to exits, the availability and use of evacuation equipment, and lessons learned from prior emergency situations involving individuals with physical disabilities.

These considerations directly impact a school's ability to respond quickly and safely during an emergency. This legislation was developed in collaboration with the Maryland Center for School Safety, whose guidance helped shape the structure and safeguards of the bill. The bill clarifies that guidance provided by MCSS is advisory and intended to support local school systems as they strengthen emergency preparedness with student safety at the forefront.

A portion of this bill, HB694, passed this Committee last year, reflecting shared recognition that accessibility must be integrated into school safety planning. Based on feedback received, including recommendations from the Maryland Center for School Safety, this year's bill incorporates refinements to address those concerns while preserving the bill's core purpose.

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Ultimately, this bill is about making sure that no student is overlooked during an emergency. It promotes safer planning, stronger preparedness, and greater peace of mind for families, educators, and students across Maryland.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB311. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.