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House Ways and Means Committee

Re: HB1182 – Public and Nonpublic Schools – Student Elopement – Locative Devices

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Madam Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Shari Bailey, and I am the Founder of Laila's Gift, a Maryland nonprofit that supports families of individuals with non-apparent disabilities and advocates for policies that improve safety and quality of life for caregivers and those they support. I am also the mother of a beautiful daughter, Laila, who is nonverbal, autistic, and lives with a rare genetic syndrome.

Laila is what professionals refer to as an “elopер.” Like many children with autism and related conditions, she is at risk of wandering or elopement, meaning she may leave a safe environment without understanding danger or the ability to call for help.

This risk is not hypothetical for our family. It is so well documented that Laila's Individualized Education Program (IEP) specifically identifies that she is at risk of wandering and elopement.

Why This Bill Matters

For families like mine, every day involves balancing the desire to give our children independence with the responsibility to keep them safe.

HB1182 would allow families and schools to voluntarily incorporate the use of locative technology into a student's IEP plan, when appropriate. This simple but powerful provision creates a clear framework for coordination between families and schools in the event of an elopement crisis.

When a child elopes, **every second matters.**



Many children who elope do not understand danger. They may be drawn toward traffic, train tracks, or bodies of water. National research shows that nearly half of children with autism will wander at some point, and tragically, many fatal incidents occur near water.

For parents like me, the fear is constant. When Laila leaves a safe environment, she is not running away in the traditional sense — she is exploring the world through her own lens, without the ability to understand the risks around her.

The Importance of Coordination

In many cases today, families independently use locative devices to help ensure their child's safety. However, there is often no clear coordination between caregivers and schools regarding how these tools can be integrated into safety plans.

HB1182 addresses this gap.

By allowing locative devices to be **voluntarily included within a student's IEP**, the bill supports:

- Clear communication between families and school staff
- Defined safety protocols if a child elopes
- Faster response times when a child is missing
- Shared understanding of how safety technology may be used appropriately

This bill does not mandate technology. Instead, it simply creates a pathway for families and schools to work together when technology could enhance safety.

For caregivers already managing complex medical, educational, and behavioral needs, this kind of coordination can make an enormous difference.

Broader Impact

As the Founder of Laila's Gift, I work with families across Maryland who face similar challenges. Elopement is not rare within the disability community — it is a frequent and deeply frightening reality.

HB1182 provides a practical, compassionate solution that respects both family choice and school partnership.

Policies like this help ensure that children with disabilities can participate in school environments while maintaining safeguards that protect their safety and well-being.

When caregivers and schools are better equipped to respond to elopement risks, children are safer, families have greater peace of mind, and communities are better prepared to support individuals with disabilities.



As a mother, an advocate, and the founder of an organization dedicated to protecting vulnerable individuals, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **favorable report on HB1182**.

This legislation recognizes a simple but critical truth: **when a child who is vulnerable goes missing, every moment matters**.

Giving families and schools the ability to coordinate around voluntary safety tools can help ensure that children like Laila are found quickly and returned safely.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,

Shari Bailey
Founder, CEO, Caregiver
Laila's Gift