

## The LEAD Act™ (Laila's Elopement Awareness & Dissemination Act)

A statewide initiative designed to ensure coordinated prevention, response, and training for autism-related elopement.

### Key Components

- Increase awareness through education, outreach, support, and community engagement
- Develop safety plans by mapping local risks such as bodies of water and egress points
- Provide mandatory training for school staff and first responders
- Expand access to assistive safety technology, and family resources
- Ensure accountability through annual data collection and progress reporting



## Maryland's First Steps: **Purple Alert (2024)** & **Ace's Law (2025)**

- 01 Implemented an emergency notification system for missing persons with Intellectual and Development Disabilities (Purple Alert, House Bill 195).
- 02 Required schools to notify families, document incidents and create prevention plans for elopement (Ace's Law, House Bill 1204).
- 03 Both laws are great initial steps to a more comprehensive approach between first responders, family caregivers, and professional caregivers.

## Statewide Goals: 2026–2028

- Train at least **25,000** school personnel and first responders
- Equip at least **5,000** family caregivers with life-saving tools and resource directories
- Achieve **zero fatal elopement incidents** in Maryland.
- Position **Maryland as a national model** for autism safety and response.

## Empowering Families and Communities

- **Builds** trust and safety partnerships.
- **Creates** consistent crisis response plans across institutions.
- **Strengthens** communication between families and public safety.
- **Protects** student privacy and parental control.

## Together, we can prevent tragedy.

Support **The LEAD Act™** in Maryland's 2026 General Assembly.

Encourage local adoption and training programs.

## Join Laila's Gift® Advocacy Network.

Share your story to inspire change.

Safety is not a privilege – it is a right every child deserves.

### Contact:

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## LAILA'S GIFT®

## Leading Maryland's Response to Autism-Related Elopement

### The Wandering Crisis: Leading the Way to Safety

Every year, thousands of children with autism wander from safe environments, often ending in tragic outcomes. Laila's Gift® is leading a statewide mission to prevent these tragedies through Access, Coordination, and Training.

**Together,**  
we can build a safer Maryland for every child.



## National Crisis Overview

Nearly **50% of children** who have autism have eloped at least once, some as frequent as once per week. This behavior typically begins around age four.

1 in 3 are nonverbal or unable to communicate personal information.

Hundreds of deaths tied to elopement, mostly from drowning

Families report emotional trauma and burnout.



## Maryland Snapshot

- Dozens of reported elopement emergencies each year.
- Most involve young, nonverbal students during school transitions.
- No statewide system for elopement tracking or rapid response.
- Training and technology use varies by district.

### Statewide Stats

- Approximately **889,900** school-aged children are enrolled in Maryland's public schools (pre-K through 12th grade).
- An estimated **1 in 43 Maryland children** have autism – based on prevalence among 8-year-olds – representing roughly **20,695** students statewide.
- Based on national wandering statistics, approximately **10,140** of these children are at risk for wandering/elopement, with some incidents occurring as often as once per week.
- Approximately **1,723** children with autism in Maryland may face an increased **risk of death associated with elopement** (about 17%).
- Approximately **1,567** children are at heightened **risk of drowning related to elopement** (about 91% of fatal outcomes).

**Note:** The prevalence of Autism continues to increase in the state of Maryland. The rate of early diagnosis is improving, meaning this issue will only get **BIGGER**

Statistics shown above are based on estimates from a collection of data sources.

## Sources

- National Autism Association. (2022).** Autism & Wandering: Data Summary and Safety Toolkit.
- National Autism Safety Council. (2023).** National Report on Autism Elopement, Fatalities & School Safety Preparedness.
- Anderson, C. et al. (2012).** Occurrence and Family Impact of Elopement in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Pediatrics.
- CDC (2023).** Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2023).** National Population Estimates.
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. (2023).** Missing children statistics and safety risks. NCMEC Research Division.
- Maryland at a Glance.** MarylandPublicSchools.org. "In school year 2022–23, over 889,900 students enrolled in Maryland public schools from Pre-K to high school."
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023).** Maryland: Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network (Surveillance Summary). U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

### Nationwide Stats

- ~**55 million** individuals between the age of 4–17 in the US.
- 1 in 31 children**, roughly 2.9% of U.S. children – about **1.5 million children** – are on the spectrum.
- 49%** of these children are at risk of wandering or elopement approximately **750,000 children**.
- 17%** of elopements end **are fatal**.
- With **91%** of wandering fatalities **due to drowning**.

Statistics shown above are based on estimates from a collection of data sources.

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