

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 948 (Delegates Aumann and West)
Health and Government Operations

**Baltimore County - Volunteer Fire, Rescue, and Ambulance Companies -
Funding Allocation**

This bill requires that in Baltimore County, the allocation of State fire aid funding to volunteer fire, rescue, and ambulance companies be determined by a two-thirds vote of (1) the president of the Baltimore County Volunteer Fireman’s Association (BCVFA); (2) the chair of the BCVFA revolving capital loan fund; and (3) the chief of the Baltimore County Fire Department.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2015.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: State formula aid to local governments for fire and rescue services is not affected. The finances of the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) are not materially affected.

Local Effect: Baltimore County fire and rescue State aid funding is not directly affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: The Senator William H. Amoss Fire, Rescue, and Ambulance Fund (Amoss Fund) provides grants to local jurisdictions for the purchase of fire and rescue equipment and capital building improvements. These grants are administered by MEMA. Funding is based on each county’s proportionate share of property tax accounts (including

vacant unimproved properties) relative to the statewide total, as certified by the State Department of Assessments and Taxation.

Chapter 332 of 2013 requires that each county distribute to volunteer fire, rescue, and ambulance companies either a percentage equal to the percentage of funds distributed to volunteer companies in fiscal 2011 or at least 51% of the allocation received, whichever is greater. Chapter 225 of 2014 requires each county to distribute funds to volunteer fire, rescue, and ambulance companies on the basis of need, in accordance with specified factors that a county must consider in determining need. A county that fails to maintain a level of specified local spending for fire protection services equal to the average expenditure for the three preceding fiscal years is subject to a State aid penalty equal to the percentage by which the county fails to maintain effort. County expenditures for fire protection must at least match the State aid.

Background: The Governor's proposed fiscal 2016 budget provides a total of \$13.4 million in Amoss Fund fire and rescue aid funding to local governments, including \$1.5 million for Baltimore County. Baltimore County advises that under current law, the chief of the Baltimore County Fire Department directs funding to volunteer companies on the basis of need. Under the bill, the BCFVA has the deciding vote regarding allocation of funds to volunteer companies. County government, not BCFVA, continues to be held accountable for meeting maintenance of effort.

Local Fiscal Effect: State aid to Baltimore County for fire and rescue services is not directly affected. Baltimore County advises that some volunteer companies have not maintained adequate records on the use of government funds. Removing allocation authority from the county government could potentially result in State aid penalties if, under the bill, funds on average are more likely to be allocated to volunteer companies that fail to track and/or manage funds adequately. However, such consequences may not be realized, or may be minimal.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 473 (Senators Jennings and Brochin) - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

Information Source(s): Baltimore County, Department of Legislative Services

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min/lgc

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