



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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HB 274

DATE: February 21, 2023

SPONSOR: Delegates Bhandari, Forbes, A. Johnson, S. Johnson, and Kaiser

ASSIGNED TO: Health & Government Operations

CONTACT PERSON: Leslie Frey (leslie.frey@montgomerycountymd.gov)

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT

Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department Wait Times

House Bill 274 establishes the Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department Wait Times to study best practices and potential solutions for reducing emergency department (ED) wait times in the State. As introduced, membership of the Task Force is limited to one member of the Senate of Maryland; one member of the House of Delegates; the Secretary of Health, or the Secretary's designee; and the following four members, appointed by the Governor: one representative from the Maryland Hospital Association; two representatives of patient advocacy organizations; and one individual who is employed as medical staff in an emergency department. The Task Force must issue a report on its findings by January 1, 2024, to the Governor and the General Assembly. Montgomery County requests that this much needed bill be amended to add EMS representation to the task force.

ED crowding is a complex issue that results in multiple downstream and adverse effects on EMS systems, such as rendering our transport units unavailable to respond to other 911 calls while waiting at an ED for a bed to become available for a patient. Hospital delays also increase costs: Montgomery County has proactively dedicated an EMS supervisor to oversee the distribution of ambulances so that no hospital gets overwhelmed by the volume of ED patients. This comes at a direct cost to the County which is not reimbursed by the State or hospitals. Montgomery County also incurs costs from EMS personnel whose shifts extend into overtime due to prolonged waiting times to admit patients into the ED. If the problem of emergency department overcrowding throughout the State is not addressed, we will ultimately need more EMS units and personnel. Additionally, hospital delays impact our volunteer EMS personnel: being detained at the ED beyond the end of a volunteer shift makes it difficult for volunteers to get to their primary jobs on time. Local volunteer fire chiefs cite this problem as a bona fide recruitment and retention barrier.

Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service has been an innovator at exploring solutions to these issues. In addition to the transport supervisor, we implemented an alternative destination program and added telehealth services for treatment-in-place. However, we've had little success diverting a meaningful volume or the appropriate acuity of patients away from the emergency department.

Montgomery County strongly agrees with the need for the Task Force proposed by House Bill 274 but respectfully requests an amendment to include representation on the Task Force by a leader from a high-volume EMS program.