



# Independent Hose Company

310 Baughmans Lane Frederick, Maryland 21702 (301) 600 - 1720



Good afternoon Chairman Barnes and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

My name is Robert Wells and I am writing in support of House Bill 1389. I am the volunteer Deputy Chief with the Independent Hose Company in Frederick Maryland and a previous Volunteer Chief officer with the Bladensburg Volunteer Fire Department. I have 35 years of experience as an emergency first responder in the state of Maryland. I believe we as a state can do more to honor those who give so much to our communities and are forced to bear the trauma burnt into their memory.

House Bill 1389 addresses a critical issue that affects all fire and EMS providers. The bill offers disability benefits to members who are exposed to a variety of mental health traumas and who leave public service due to mental crises. While thousands of dollars are put toward personal protective gear, training, and equipment for every responder, at the end of the day, some diagnosed individuals are left scarred by what their eyes have seen and can no longer function as public servants.

I would like to point out a few key points to bring this bill into perspective.

First, we have made great strides over the years in mental health assistance for emergency responders. Assistance such as employee assistance programs, crisis response teams, therapy animals, and mental health counselors within the organizations. While these programs have helped many get healthy and return to work others are not so fortunate. Neither career nor volunteer responders are exempt from the crisis

Second, our department responded to the report of children trapped in an apartment building. Once on scene, rescuers were able to remove the three children trapped and started resuscitation utilizing CPR and airway assistance. The incident was impactful to all those who were on the incident. The children we were attempting to save were badly burned and trying to manage CPR and their airway while there's skin was coming off was challenging, to say the least. The next day I received a phone call from one of our personnel stating they couldn't take it anymore and wanted to end it all. This was difficult as we worked through the issues he was facing from that terrible call and got him help. After the incident, he never returned to public safety again but is living well with his family.

Lastly, I was personally helpless in aiding a friend of mine after we spoke together about our kids the night before we left for work. The next morning everything seemed normal and calm. When I arrived at work and was watching the morning news I realized an accident had happened. The same person I was talking to no more than a few hours earlier had taken his own life and was never to return home to his family.

On a personal level, I was almost someone who left the profession 30 years ago. As we get older we say the fire and EMS service is a young person's job but those experiences can come with a cost. As a young volunteer, it is difficult to think we could lose our lives at such a young age. I



# Independent Hose Company

310 Baughmans Lane Frederick, Maryland 21702 (301) 600 - 1720



witnessed the suffering of violent attacks on those around me including the experience of fire deaths of those I grew up with. A short time later I was involved in a significant fire that almost cost me my life. I was significantly burned on my head, face, and hands. I endured a year-long recovery process and when I was able to ride again I was hesitant to go and do the job. The department I was with put in significant time and effort to support me in getting through the nightmare I was hiding from everyone. All the support I received allowed me to continue on today serving my communities. The fire and EMS service has a great support structure to help anyone however not everyone can recover and are having to leave the service.

The things we see in public safety are things only those in active war in the military would encounter. Being exposed to and seeing trauma through the years is not something any human is used to or should be used to. Supporting this bill will help those who put their lives on the line exposing themselves to endure mental suffering that sometimes can be healed and sometimes will be their disability.

In conclusion, House Bill 1389 presents a crucial opportunity to address disabilities suffered by individuals in public service. They make a positive difference and most importantly make a significant impact in the lives of every community member we are sworn to protect. I urge you to support HB1389 for the betterment of our community, our state, and our country. Thank you for considering my testimony

Feel Free to reach out to me.

Robert Wells  
Robw6351@gmail.com