



House Bill 1439

Public Health - Funding for Trauma Centers and Services

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Appropriations Committee

WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: February 28, 2024

From: Dominic J. Butchko and Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 1439 WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill, among other actions, increases the motor vehicle surcharge, which funds the Maryland Emergency Medical System Operations Fund (MEMSOF). This fund is already the central source for State assistance to fire companies, and counties urge that the funding and mission of HB 1439 be amended to additionally target urgent needs of fire service employees.

Today, when Marylanders dial 9-1-1, there is an expectation that first responders will arrive within a matter of minutes and instantaneously deliver care. Marylanders have rightfully grown to rely on this service as it has become a core pillar of a functioning society. However, that pillar is eroding and in more and more pockets of the state, emergency response times are starting to creep up. No one is more cognizant, or more concerned with this growing trend, than Maryland's 24 counties.

For two years, MACo has spearheaded an all-hands-on-deck, multistakeholder collaborative effort - to call attention to and find solutions for Maryland's fire and EMS recruitment and retention crisis. This effort led to the 2023 creation of the Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and EMS Within Maryland, which included the Maryland Association of Counties, Maryland Municipal League, Maryland State Firemen's Association, International Association of Firefighters, Maryland Fire Rescue Institute, Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems, Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association, and the Maryland Fire Chiefs Association.

In December 2023, the Commission delivered a detailed report outlining the current state of fire and EMS recruitment and retention and outlined several recommendations to reverse these startling trends. While it is easy to create policies and establish programs, without resources, Marylanders will continue to be put at a greater and greater risk. **Counties request that, through amendments to HB 1439, an additional \$2.00 be added to the motor vehicle surcharge and reserved specifically for the recruitment and retention incentives outlined in HB 899/SB 692, the Commission's programmatic recommendations.**

Counties request that \$2.00 be added to the motor vehicle surcharge in order to implement fire and EMS recruitment and retention incentives. For this reason, MACo urges the Committee to give HB 1439 a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report. Additional information on MACo's firefighter and EMS recruitment and retention initiative is included on the next page, for reference.

Broad Overview of MACo's Firefighter and EMS Recruitment and Retention Initiative

MACo's Fire and EMS initiative implements several of the recommendations from the 2023 report of the Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and EMS Within Maryland.

#1 – Strengthens the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program

- **Expands** the program to cover 100% of the cost of tuition and mandatory fees at in-state community colleges and for undergraduate education, and 50% of tuition and mandatory fees for graduate education.
- **Expands** the universe of programs which qualify for funding, reflecting the needs of our modern emergency response networks.
- **Clarifies** that funding for the program is to be utilized after all other grants, scholarships, and financial aid (excluding student loans) are awarded.
- **Clarifies** that funding is available on a first-come first-serve basis.

#2 - Creates the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Firefighters and EMS Providers

- **Establishes** a new program for awarding student loan assistance to firefighters and EMS personnel based on years of service, rank, and other criteria established by MHEC.
- This new program is modeled after the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Police Officers.

#3 – Explores additional recommendations from the Commission related to childcare and healthcare

- Second to education, the Commission also identified access to childcare and healthcare as a critical barrier to recruitment and retention. These areas present a greater level of complexity and deserve additional study to develop next steps. The bill asks the Department of Budget & Management to evaluate the feasibility of:
 - a program to extend coverage through health insurance offerings for State employees to qualified firefighters who do not receive comparable coverage through their employment in that capacity. The evaluation should consider a fully employee-paid option without direct cost effects on State premiums.
 - a program to extend limited childcare coverage to career and volunteer firefighters through a cost share program where counties and the State split all costs equally.



**COMMISSION TO ADVANCE
AND STRENGTHEN FIREFIGHTING
AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL
SERVICES WITHIN MARYLAND**



November 16, 2023

The Honorable Wes Moore
Governor of Maryland
State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable William Ferguson
President, MD State Senate
H-107 State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Adrienne Jones
Speaker, MD House of Delegates
H-101, State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Recommendations from the Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and Emergency Medical Services in Maryland

Dear Governor Moore, President Ferguson, Speaker Jones, and Esteemed Members of the Maryland General Assembly:

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) was a proud participant in the work of The Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and Emergency Medical Services in Maryland (the Commission). Senate Bill 414, enacted during the 2023 legislative session, charged the Commission with assessing some of the crucial issues facing Maryland's fire and EMS services. MACo played an integral role in the body's work by providing perspective, expertise, and input that helped drive consensus and inform its final report.

During the 2023 legislative session, MACo's Legislative Committee adopted the promotion of fire and EMS recruitment and retention as one of its four major legislative initiatives. MACo worked with Senator Malcolm Augustine, Delegate Samuel Rosenberg, and stakeholders to craft legislation creating the Commission, and that effort continued over the past several months to arrive at the final report being submitted today. MACo's Legislative Committee has again adopted fire and EMS recruitment and retention as one of its top four priorities for the 2024 legislative session and will be supporting legislation seeking to implement many of the solutions outlined by the Commission.

The Maryland Association of Counties and the Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and Emergency Medical Services in Maryland are pleased to submit the following report of the Commission's activities and recommendations. While there is clearly more work to be done to solve this critical challenge, the work of this Commission will help inform direly needed improvements to Maryland's Fire and EMS services.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Sanderson'.

Michael Sanderson
Executive Director, MACo

MARYLAND STATE FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION

*Representing the Volunteer Fire, Rescue and Emergency Medical Services Personnel
-a 501(c)3 Organization*

November 16, 2023

2130 Priest Bridge Drive
Suite 4
Crofton, MD 21114

Dear Governor Moore and Esteemed Members of the Maryland General Assembly,

The Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA) was a proud participant in the work of The Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and Emergency Medical Services in Maryland. Senate Bill 414, enacted during the 2023 legislative session, charged the Commission with assessing some of the crucial issues facing Maryland's fire and EMS service. The MSFA played an integral role in the Commission's work by providing leadership, expertise, and input that helped drive and inform the Commission's important work.

The MSFA's mission is to serve, promote, advocate, and represent the interests of the volunteer fire, rescue and emergency medical services of Maryland. In our long history of providing support and resources for our volunteer fire, EMS departments and rescue squads, we realize and appreciate our role in helping strengthen recruitment and retention efforts across the State. Through state appropriation and federally-funded grants, we have been making great strides in increasing the numbers of volunteer personnel and are grateful to the Maryland Association of Counties for bringing forth this essential legislation to continue to move that progress forward.

The Maryland State Firemen's Association and The Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and Emergency Medical Services in Maryland are pleased to present the following report of the Commission's activities and recommendations. The MSFA intends that these recommendations can help inform crucially needed improvements to Maryland's Fire and EMS services.

Sincerely,

Kate Loveless
Executive Director, MSFA



State of Maryland
Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems

Wes Moore
Governor

Clay B. Stamp
Chairman, EMS Board

Theodore R. Delbridge, MD, MPH
Executive Director



November 21, 2023

The Honorable Governor Wes Moore
The Honorable Members of the Maryland General Assembly
State House
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Governor Moore, Senators and Delegates,

The Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Systems (MIEMSS) is proud to have participated in the work of The Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and Emergency Medical Services in Maryland. Senate Bill 414 (Chapter 655, Laws of the 2023 Session) created the Commission and charged it with assessing crucial issues facing Maryland's fire and EMS services. MIEMSS played an integral role in the Commission's work by providing leadership, expertise, and input that helped drive and inform the Commission's important work.

MIEMSS is an independent state agency that coordinates all components of the statewide emergency medical services (EMS) system in accordance with policies set by the State EMS Board and Maryland statute and regulation. EMS Clinicians and Fire Fighters are the backbone of our emergency response and prehospital emergency care system. Ensuring sufficient numbers of well-trained, highly qualified and adequately supported members of this workforce is crucial to the ongoing operation and continued success of our statewide EMS and public safety system.

MIEMSS and The Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and Emergency Medical Services in Maryland are pleased to present the following report of the Commission's activities and recommendations. We hope these recommendations can help inform crucially needed improvements to Maryland's Fire and EMS services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Theodore Delbridge'.

Theodore Delbridge, MD, MPH
Executive Director

Section 1: Legislative History of the Commission

In the Spring of 2022, the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) began hearing from predominantly rural counties that they were having challenges staffing their volunteer fire departments. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that all 24 counties were seeing significant decreases in applications and engagement in both career and volunteer departments. In the fall of 2022, MACo's Legislative Committee directed the Association to pursue the creation of a commission to examine the issue and develop recommendations. The effort was adopted as one of MACo's Legislative Initiatives.

Leading up to the 2023 Legislative Session, MACo began consulting with stakeholders in all corners of firefighting and emergency response. By January, the coalition included the MACo, the Maryland Municipal League (MML), the Professional Firefighters of Maryland (PFFMD), the Maryland State Firemen's Association (MFSA), the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems, the Maryland Fire Rescue Institute (MFRI), the Maryland Fire Chief's Association, and the Metropolitan Fire Chief's Association.

Senator Malcom Augustine and Delegate Samuel Rosenberg sponsored the initial legislation (SB414 & HB788) in the General Assembly. The intent of the bill was simple: establish a commission of subject matter experts and practitioners to fully evaluate the fire and EMS recruitment and retention crisis and develop recommendations. Specifically, the bill stated:

"The Commission shall study and make recommendations regarding:

the effectiveness and viability of uniform incentives, offerings, or practices employed in other states to attract, support, and retain individuals in fire fighting and emergency medical services roles;

the suitability of comparable or similar incentives, offerings, and practices as compared to the landscape of the State; and

any other global issues the Commission may consider useful in enhancing and supporting career and volunteer fire fighting and emergency medical services in the State."

Believing that expediency was key, the coalition opted to issue a final report with recommendations in December 2023. The General Assembly passed SB 414 and the Governor enacted the bill on May 16, 2023.

Section 2: Membership and Meeting Schedule

Role	Name	Appointed by
Co-Chair	Chief Tiffany Green , Prince George's County Fire Department	Maryland Association of Counties (MACo)
Co-Chair	Kate Loveless , Executive Director Maryland State Firemen's Association	Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA)
Member	Angelica Bailey Thurpari , Director of Advocacy & Public Affairs	Maryland Municipal League (MML)
Member	Calvin Bonenberger , Administrator Town of Rising Sun, Maryland	Maryland Municipal League (MML)
Member	Gerald "JJ" Lynott , President Maryland Fire Chiefs Association	Maryland Fire Chiefs Association
Member	Grant Walker , Vice President Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland (PFFM)	Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland (PFFM)
Member	Chief Joanne Rund , Baltimore County Fire Department	Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association
Member	Jeff Buddle , Vice President Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland (PFFM)	Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland (PFFM)
Member	Jonathan Dayton , Chair Recruitment and Retention Committee	Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA)
Member	Michael Cox, Jr. , Executive Director Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute	Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI)
Member	Steven Theroux , Ast. Budget Officer Anne Arundel County	Maryland Association of Counties (MACo)
Member	Theodore R. Delbridge , M.D., Executive Director, MIEMSS Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems	Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS)

Alternate	Stephan Cox , Operations Sec. Chief Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute	Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI)
Alternate	Dominic J. Butchko , Associate Policy Director, Maryland Association of Counties	Maryland Association of Counties (MACo)
Alternate	Michael Rund	Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland (PFFM)
Alternate	Patricia S. Gainer , Deputy Director Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems	Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS)
Alternate	Robert Phillips , Executive Member Maryland State Firemen's Association	Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA)
Alternate	Chief Thomas Coe , Frederick County Fire Department	Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association
Staff	Logan Dean , Program Manager Apprenticeship & Training Maryland Department of Labor	Maryland Department of Labor

Date	Time	Location
June 20, 2023	2 - 4 PM	Ocean City Convention Center <i>4001 Coastal Hwy. Ocean City, MD 21842</i>
July 25, 2023	12 - 2 PM	Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute <i>4500 Campus Drive College Park, MD 20742</i>
August 14, 2023	5 - 6 PM	Virtual
August 22, 2023	12 - 2 PM	Maryland State Firemen's Association <i>2130 Priest Bridge Dr #4, Crofton, MD 21114</i>
September 12, 2023	5 - 6 PM	Virtual
September 22, 2023	12 - 2 PM	Maryland Association of Counties <i>169 Conduit Street, Annapolis, MD 21401</i>
October 3, 2023	11 - 1 PM	Virtual
November 2, 2023	10 - 11 AM	Virtual
November 21, 2023	12 - 2 PM	Virtual

Section 3: Background on Maryland's Fire and EMS Service

Maryland's firefighting and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are delivered by a complex network of more than 355 departments serving urban, rural, and suburban communities all across the state. Each department is staffed by individuals specifically trained to deliver emergency response, rescue, and life support services which ensure the health and safety of the communities they serve.

Like most states across the country, Maryland's firefighting and EMS services are provided by both full time paid workers and volunteers. In more populated jurisdictions where emergency call volumes are highest, services are more often delivered by "career" firefighters and EMS practitioners who are generally employees of county or municipal governments. Conversely, Maryland's rural communities often depend on volunteer units or combinations of volunteer and career members. Volunteer firefighters and EMS practitioners are still trained and are highly qualified professionals; however, they are not generally compensated on an hourly basis for the services they perform.

According to the United States' Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), more than 9,000 Marylanders were employed as professional firefighters, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), or paramedics in May 2022. While this figure includes the thousands of career firefighters and EMTs who also serve as volunteers, there are likely thousands more uncounted volunteer firefighters and EMTs across the State.

While most members of the firefighting and EMS service in Maryland have some combination of experience with both volunteer and fulltime professional firefighting and EMS, the Commission devoted individualized attention to some of the unique issues faced by the "career" and "volunteer" operational structures. Additionally, separate consideration is given where possible to EMS practitioners, which collectively include EMTs, paramedics, and other professionals specifically trained and certified to render basic and advanced life support services.

In addition to local departments, Maryland's firefighting and EMS are also supported and coordinated by a number of State agencies, including the Office of the State Fire Marshal, the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI), the Maryland Institute of Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS) the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM), the Shock Trauma Center, and the Maryland State Police Aviation Command (MSPAC).

Challenges for Maryland's Fire and EMS Service

Like many other industries, Maryland's fire and EMS service is facing crucial skilled labor shortages and major disruptions in hiring, training, and recruitment. While some of

these disruptions can be traced to the effects of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering impacts on the American workforce, firefighting and EMS have separately seen long term declines in overall recruitment and retention.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, the proportion of volunteer firefighters dropped from a high of 8.05 volunteers per 1,000 people in 1987 to a low of 5.8 in 2017.¹ While the concentration of volunteer departments in rural communities and an overall decline in rural population can account for some of the loss in volunteer departments, there has been notable decline in the number of new volunteers entering fire and EMS service nationally, leading to a greater dependence on older volunteers and retired professionals.

Career fire and EMS departments have reported similar declines. In October 2023, Prince George's County Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics Association (IAFF Local 1619), the union representing firefighters in Prince George's County, claimed that members had reported more than 1,000 instances of mandatory overtime between August and September 2023, amounting to more than 12,000 hours.

Mandatory overtimes are not unique to any one department or jurisdiction in Maryland and they have become symptomatic of the understaffed conditions in many career departments. As recruitments have lagged, many jurisdictions have implemented bonuses, incentives, and other recruitment and outreach programs to drive new hiring.

Understaffing and a shrinking labor pool present a clear threat to Maryland's fire and EMS services. Consistent with the legislative charge, the Commission reviewed several aspects of how Maryland attracts, supports, and retains its critical fire and EMS workers, and has drawn comparisons with findings from other statewide reports.

Fire and EMS Recruitment in Maryland

Many of the Commission members who serve as department chiefs, administrators, educators and leaders in the fire and EMS service highlighted the numerous programs and incentives in place to drive recruitment of firefighters and EMS practitioners in Maryland. Historically, much of this recruitment occurred more or less naturally. For many years, departments relied on a steady stream of local volunteers, led into fire and EMS service by family members, friends, and relationships with local departments. Many volunteers would use their experience to gain skills and exposure, with a sizable percentage eventually advancing in the service to become officers, sworn firefighters, EMS practitioners, and educators.

As the industry changed and professionalized over the years, and the volunteer pipeline began to narrow, the perception of firefighting as a career path also changed. Occupational hazards and the demanding work hours firefighters and EMS practitioners face are readily apparent to most who are considering fire and EMS as a career path.

¹ National Fire Protection Association Journal. 2020. "[Culture Clash](#)." Angelo Verzoni.

Similarly, wages, earning potential, and benefits for fire and EMS are often assumed by the general public to be low. Where departments could once rest on periodic recruitments which solicited large numbers of applications, many are now facing declining recruitment responses, attrition issues, and large waves of impending retirements.

Maryland’s Wages, Benefits, Incentives

BLS and US Census Bureau statistics report that career firefighters, EMTs, and Paramedics in Maryland see varying hourly and annual wages, generally corresponding with the level of training and certification required for each occupation. While each earns more than 100% of Maryland’s State Minimum Wage as of October 2023 (\$13.25) each occupation earned less than 70% Maryland’s median annual household income (\$91,431) with career EMTs earning just less than half at 48%.

Employment Statistics: Firefighters, EMTs, and Paramedics

Occupation	Employment	Median Hourly Wage	% of State Minimum Wage	Annual Median Wage	% of median Household Income
Firefighters	4,660	\$29.21	220%	\$60,760	66%
EMTs	2,740	\$21.21	160%	\$44,230	48%
Paramedics	1,820	\$29.45	222%	\$61,260	67%

*US Bureau of Labor Statistics
US Census Bureau*

While income and cost of living vary considerably across Maryland, the fact that median earnings for career firefighters and EMS practitioners consistently fall below the state household income median creates an economic signal to those who may be considering fire and EMS as a career path. Additionally, volunteer members, who are generally not paid hourly wages, often rely on non-fire and EMS work, retirement income, or friends and family to meet cost of living needs while serving.

Outside of paid wages, most full time sworn firefighters and EMS clinicians are also covered by employer sponsored health insurance benefits and county or municipally sponsored retirement and pension programs. While a great degree of variability exists in the benefits available between jurisdictions, most provide comparable levels of compensation.

Examples of Career Fire/EMS Benefit Programs in Maryland

Anne Arundel County offers a 20 year pension retirement with 50% of the salary, with an employee contribution of 7.25%. The County also offers a Deferred Retirement Option Plan (Drop). The Drop program requires 20 years of creditable service. The minimum participation is three years with options of four to six years.

Howard County offers a 20 year retirement with 50% of the salary, with an employee contribution of 7.75% of the pension. They also have the Drop, which requires 25 years of creditable service. The minimum participation is two years with a maximum of five years.

Baltimore County Baltimore County offers a basic pension retirement plan for members with the following parameters: Employees hired prior to July 2007 are eligible after attaining twenty-five (25) years of creditable service; Employees hired after July 2007 shall be eligible after thirty (30) years of creditable service; or if they have reached age 60. Employees may retire prior to those years with a percentage of their average final compensation (AFC) depending on their years of creditable service. Members hired prior to July 2007 contribute 9.5% and members hired after July 2007 contribute 10.78%. Baltimore County also offers Deferred Retirement Option Plan (Drop) and a back-DROP (for employees hired on or after July 1, 2001). Post-2007 members are afforded an option for a 3-year back-DROP.

Montgomery County offers three different retirement plans based on when an individual enrolled in the program. A 20 year retirement and the salary is based on the average final earnings while the other plan is retirement age dependent. The employee pension contribution differs based on the plan, with one being 7.50% and the other contribution 10.5%. They also have the Drop, which requires three years of participation and is only open to those in the G retirement plan.

Prince George's County has a 20 year retirement pension with an employee contribution of 10%. The pension is calculated and paid at 2.5% per year of the average annual compensation of the employee. Prince George's County has the Drop program. The employee has to be in their 23rd year of employment and can be in the program for a maximum of three years.

Absent formal pension programs and paid hourly wages, volunteers in Maryland have a slightly different benefit and incentive structure centered around the Length of Service Award Program (LOSAP). LOSAP is a county or municipal funded program which provides a monthly or regular cash award after a defined number of years of service with a volunteer fire, rescue, or EMS department in Maryland.

Examples of Volunteer Fire/EMS Benefit Programs in Maryland

Anne Arundel County offers between \$300-\$400 per month for life depending on years of active service (LOSAP Information Manual Version 4.1, Published May 12, 2017).

Baltimore County offers \$300 per month for life to members who are 60 years old and have completed 25 years of creditable service.

Howard County's base payment for LOSAP is equal to 1% of the current annual starting salary of a trainee in the Department for life. An additional \$10.00/month

is added for each full year of certified active service over 25 years, as well as an additional \$10.00 per month for operational personnel following the completed additional year of operational service (General Order 120.04, Issued July 28, 2016).

Montgomery County offers a range of \$96.00-\$360.50 in monthly LOSAP payments, which is dependent on years of active service (LOSAP Brochure published August 31, 2021).

Prince George's County offers between \$225.00-\$450.00 in monthly LOSAP payments, depending on years of active service. Volunteers and spouses receiving benefits also receive the cost of living adjustments (COLAs) awarded to the career fire service (LOSAP Standards and Procedures Guide, revised February 25, 2020).

LOSAP qualifying volunteer members can be eligible for county or municipality paid death and burial benefits. As with other programs, these benefits can vary considerably by municipality.

Hiring and Candidate Qualification in Maryland

The hiring process for fire and EMS personnel in Maryland varies by jurisdiction and typically contains multiple steps spanning several months. The process often begins with the submission of an application. Additional steps in the hiring process may include the successful completion of a written test, physical ability evaluation, interview, medical physical evaluation, psychological evaluation, and background investigation. The application process ensures that applicants meet the minimum requirements for the position and allows the employer to gain basic contact information and data about the applicant. Minimum requirements for new hire fire and EMS personnel generally involve a minimum age, typically 18 years old, as well as requirements including the completion of a high school diploma and possession of a driver's license.

The written examination component of most hiring processes measures the key knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success in the public safety setting, while the physical ability evaluation consists of a variety of activities that simulate firefighting tasks to ensure that the candidate can physically complete at a basic performance level of a very physically demanding career. One of the most popular physical ability tests many jurisdictions utilize is the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT). This test was developed and validated jointly by the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) and International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). This standardized test has the candidate perform eight specific tasks in less than 10 minutes and 20 seconds. The CPAT process requires that departments provide an eight week long period of preparatory training opportunities for the candidates to voluntarily participate if they choose to do so.

Another typical step in the industry is conducting oral interviews with a panel of internal fire officials. Generally, a list of candidates that will be afforded a conditional offer is

generated and those that accept the offer then move forward to complete their next steps towards being selected. Those next steps involve a medical physical examination compliant with the National Fire Protection Association's Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments (NFPA 1582).

The medical examination not only ensures that candidates are medically able to perform the functions of the position, but also provides a pre-employment medical baseline for the candidate. This baseline is a critical marker in a career that has so many occupational exposures to health concerns. Additionally, a pre-employment psychological evaluation may be completed by a licensed psychologist who specializes in public safety, in order to identify candidate characteristics that lead to successful performance or identify characteristics of concern.

An essential step in the hiring process is the background investigation. This is completed by most fire departments to ensure that the candidate's character has the highest standards of integrity and trustworthiness required by a public safety official. Background investigations are conducted by a trained investigator and can include criminal history, employment verification, and driving record. Departments who hire previously trained candidates may perform a skills competency evaluation to ensure that the individual's knowledge and skills are at an appropriate level.

While each step of the hiring and candidate qualification process is essential to ensuring that Maryland's departments have a fully trained and qualified staff of fire and EMS personnel who can safely carry out job duties, many recruits will fail to complete one or more stages of this vetting process. Additionally, the length, complexity, and opportunity costs associated with the process often lead to candidates dropping out to pursue options that can provide a more immediate path to employment.

Training and Licensure

There is no State licensure or certification requirement for individuals to serve as firefighters in Maryland. A firefighter who also serves as an EMS clinician must meet the requirements for EMS certification. There are multiple levels of EMS certification in Maryland.

Basic Life Support is provided by State-certified emergency medical dispatchers (EMD), emergency medical responders (EMRs), and EMTs.

Advanced Life Support, available in all jurisdictions, is provided by State-licensed Cardiac Rescue Technicians and Paramedics.

Volunteer and career prehospital personnel alike must complete State-required educational courses, which are provided through the Maryland Fire Rescue Institute (MFRI) and jurisdictional training academies. Colleges and other post-secondary institutions also provide Emergency Services Training in the state of Maryland for EMR, EMT and Paramedic level.

Upon successful course completion, individuals must pass national certifying examinations of the National Registry of EMTs, as well as State practical exams, before being certified / licensed in Maryland and authorized to provide care in accordance with the Maryland Medical Protocols. Maintenance of EMS certification or licensure requires that the EMS Clinician complete annual protocol updates as well as continuing education requirements on a two- or three-year basis, depending upon the level of EMS Clinician.

While not required by state law or local governments, there are certification options for emergency responders in the State of Maryland that are offered by the Maryland Fire Service Personnel Qualifications Board (MFSPQB). This system, known as the Maryland Voluntary Fire Service Certification System, provides national and state certifications through the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications ("Pro Board," which is an entity of the National Fire Protection Agency), and the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) in various fire, rescue, hazmat, code enforcement, fire investigation, and other emergency services disciplines. There are some fire departments in Maryland that require these certifications for hiring, promotion, and special teams' affiliation.

Certification can be obtained by completing a course of instruction, breakdown and evaluation of training by a local accredited review agency, an equivalency challenge examination, or a portfolio review of the applicant's coursework and standard requirements. Emergency services training in the state of Maryland is accomplished in various fashions. Training for career, combination, and volunteer fire and EMS units is predominantly delivered by the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI) at the University of Maryland.

MFRI is recognized as the state's comprehensive training and education system for all-hazards responses. The Institute plans, researches, develops, and delivers quality programs to prepare agencies and individuals to protect life, property, and the environment. MFRI has more than 130 programs of instruction available to Maryland's First Responders. More than 65 of these programs qualify for National/State Certification through the MFSPQB.

Instruction is provided at MFRI's six full-fledged fire training centers strategically located around the State, as well as through the use of 13 municipal and county-owned fire training facilities, including use of individual fire stations and site-specific locations based on the instructional needs of a particular class or the local jurisdiction's training requirements.

All emergency services class deliveries and instruction are accomplished by state-certified emergency services instructors who are certified by the Maryland Instructor Certification Review Board (COMAR 13B.03.01). These instructors can be employed by MFRI or one of the other sponsoring agencies (EMS/Fire/Rescue Organizations) that are delivering a program or course of instruction under a MFRI

Academy Status Agreement. Course delivery options can be classroom-based or in an online format depending on the subject matter being delivered. Individual EMS/Fire/Rescue Organizations in the state of Maryland also have the ability to develop and/or seek training from other venues or organizations.

The Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS) also provides some training to EMS Clinicians, including training on specialty or emerging issues, continuing education topics, and recertification in various formats, including online and in-person training.

The costs associated with emergency services training in Maryland vary depending on the entity providing the training. MFRI training is offered free of charge to all career and volunteer EMS/Fire/Rescue personnel in the state of Maryland. Specialized training, updates and/or recertification training for Maryland State EMS Clinicians through MIEMSS is also free of charge.

Funding for MFRI and MIEMSS comes from the Maryland Emergency Medical Services Operations Fund (MEMSOF), which is funded by a vehicle registration fee surcharge. The MEMSOF also supports other critical components of the statewide EMS system, including the Aviation Command of the Maryland State Police.

Firefighter and EMT training delivered to an agency/organization by an outside training entity typically has an associated cost. In these cases, the departments pay the outside entity directly or utilize grant funding. These fees may or may not be passed on to the student. Likewise, EMR, EMT, and Paramedic training provided by post-secondary educational facilities have fees associated with them typically in the form of tuition that is passed on to the student enrolled in the program.

Section 4: Comparative Review of Other States

Pennsylvania: SR6 Report

On April 26, 2017, Pennsylvania adopted Senate Resolution 6, aiming to make concrete steps to improve Pennsylvania's fire and EMS services. The SR6 Commission was established to study and make recommendations on emergency medical services, government support, innovation, recruiting and retention, regulations and codes, and training and operations in Pennsylvania. The SR6 report released 27 recommendations.

Notable among Pennsylvania's recommendations was the emphasis on increasing recruitment by bolstering public financial support for compensation, training, and education - including capitalizing on the provision of free community college and university tuition for active first responders.

Additionally, Pennsylvania offered recommendations which reinforced a strong volunteer pipeline, highlighting the effectiveness of word-of-mouth recruitment, career exploration

programs, and partnerships with schools and other entities that can connect youth to the fire and EMS service.

In August 2023, the Maryland Commission to Advance Firefighting and EMS hosted Jerry Ozog, Executive Director Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute, to discuss some of the outcomes of Pennsylvania's efforts to implement improvements to the fire and EMS service. Ozog discussed how Pennsylvania began using funds from its Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) SAFER Grant to implement strategies that were recommended in the report, primarily around recruitment and outreach. While Ozog highlighted some successes, including strong uptake of a grant-funded initiative to assist recruits in acquiring turnout gear and supplies, he noted how the administration of the grant with already limited staff and little additional state resources created challenges with achieving some of their initiatives.

Ohio: Task Force on the Volunteer Fire Service

In 2021, the Ohio Task Force on the Volunteer Fire Service was charged with making recommendations using informed evidence-based best practices, specifically focused on recruitment and retention, financial resources, and training to achieve long-term stability. The report was created to recognize and address the long-term sustainability of the volunteer fire service in Ohio.

While Ohio's Task Force Report was narrowly focused on the volunteer fire service, many of its findings and recommendations echoed concerns identified in Maryland. The task force identified that the costs of training and protective equipment are often unfairly borne by volunteers, exacerbating an already difficult financial reality for many in the service. Additionally, their report highlighted that volunteer recruitment, satisfaction, and retention continued to decline.

The Task Force made many recommendations including instituting paid leave, tuition vouchers, and redesigning the structure of training and training delivery. The report also included several policy and revenue initiatives including additional taxes on fuel to fund expended support and benefits for the volunteer fire service.

In September 2023, the State of Ohio announced that the State would begin waiving all the State Fire Marshal Ohio Fire Academy fees for volunteer firefighters, enacting an important recommendation highlighted in the Task Force report. Governor Mike DeWine also incorporated a number of the Task Force's additional recommendations in his executive budget, including funding for volunteer recruitment campaigns, improvements to State data systems, and availability of grants for turnout and personal protective equipment.

Delaware: "Fire Tax"

In September 2023, the Commission also heard from Senator (ret.) Bruce Ennis from

the State of Delaware. Senator Ennis was instrumental in the implementation of Delaware's "Fire Tax" (Delaware Insurance Code, Title 18, Chapter 7: Fees and Taxes). Delaware, like Maryland, levies a 2% tax on insurance companies for the total value of premiums written in the state. Uniquely, Delaware breaks down the premiums reported by each jurisdiction and uses the values to allocate funding for local volunteer fire departments and ambulance companies in each jurisdiction. Funding disbursements for local departments are calculated as 3¾% of the total value of the tax on premiums written for the jurisdiction, paid out twice annually. Delaware's volunteer fire companies receive approximately \$2.6 million from the State's collection of insurance premium taxes.

Section 5: Maryland Fire and EMS Service Survey

In order to better understand the on-the-ground experience of Maryland's fire and EMS service members, and as a means of testing some of the recommendations and assumptions put forward in other states' examinations of their workforces, the Commission developed and issued a statewide survey. The survey consisted of 31 questions covering respondent demographics, experiences with various aspects of the recruitment, training, and retention systems, and respondent perceptions of their career and Maryland's fire and EMS service overall.

The survey was issued digitally on August 7, 2023 and advertised to all current and former members of the Maryland fire and EMS service. The survey did not collect personally identifiable information or respondent-level data that could identify any single respondent, and participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. The survey remained open until October 15, 2023 collecting a total of 3,183 responses. Results were reviewed and analyzed by staff from the Maryland Department of Labor.

Survey Results

Survey Results as "Role" Groupings

As discussed in this report, fire and EMS have a great deal of complicated overlap, with most members having a mix of career, volunteer, fire and EMS experience and training. In order to accommodate and capture this variation, the survey provided respondents with a list of many different roles and allowed them to choose all that they currently held.

In analyzing the responses, these role multi selections were grouped into different respondent categories in an attempt to collect comparative information on the volunteer, career, and EMS practitioner experiences and perspectives.

"Volunteer" Role Group

Nine-hundred and seventy-five (975) survey respondents indicated that they currently held fire and EMS roles consistent with the volunteer operational structure. Respondents in this group reported serving as volunteer firefighters, volunteer EMS practitioners, administrative or auxiliary volunteers, and volunteer

EMS or fire officers. Often some combination of these simultaneously. This group excluded all respondents who indicated that they held a “career” position at the time of their response.

“Career” Role Group

Seven-hundred and twenty (720) survey respondents indicated that they currently held fire and EMS roles consistent with the career operational structure. Due to the large number of career firefighters who also provide emergency medical services and the large number that simultaneously serve as volunteers, the career group primarily consisted of career firefighters and career firefighters who dually held volunteer and EMS roles. This grouping excluded respondents who indicated only EMS roles only, without firefighter duties.

“EMS” Role Group

Six-hundred and ninety-five (695) survey respondents indicated that they currently held only EMS practitioner roles, including both career and volunteer roles. The EMS response group includes career and volunteer, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), Emergency Medical Responders (EMRs), Cardiac Rescue Technicians (CRTs), and Paramedics. The group excluded respondents with firefighter roles, as means of providing a sample of EMS-focused respondents.

Demographic Comparison of Respondent Groups

As observed in other states, survey results indicate that Maryland’s fire and EMS service is disproportionately male, white, and non-hispanic compared to the overall workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), just 48% of Maryland’s overall workforce is male. Among the role groups sampled, 79% of volunteer respondents and 87% career respondents self-identified as male. The EMS role group was the only group sampled with gender representation proportional to the state average.

Gender as Percent of Role Group

	Volunteer	Career	EMS
Male	78.97%	87.08%	49.21%
Female	19.59%	9.86%	49.50%
Non-binary	0.21%	0.56%	0.72%
No Response	1.23%	2.50%	0.58%

*Maryland Fire and EMS Service Survey
Maryland Commission to Advanced Firefighting and EMS*

Survey respondents were also asked to disclose their age group from provided intervals. The most common age group of Maryland’s fire and EMS service members was 31 to 40 years old, with nearly 25% of respondents selecting this group. However, respondent age distribution varied significantly between the role groups sampled. Sixty-eight percent of volunteer group respondents reported being over the age 41, compared to just 41% for career respondents and 50% for EMS respondents. Nearly

9% of the volunteer group reported being 71 years of age or older, with nearly 1% of respondents selecting over 80. Comparatively, the median age for employed public safety workers in the United States in 2022 was 47.7 years².

Age as Percent of Role Group

Age Group (Years)	Volunteer	Career	EMS
16-17	1.44%	0.00%	1.29%
18-20	2.97%	1.11%	5.18%
21-30	12.62%	18.75%	18.99%
31-40	14.77%	38.33%	24.17%
41-50	15.69%	27.64%	19.28%
51-60	21.23%	12.22%	16.98%
61-70	22.36%	1.25%	9.21%
71-80	7.79%	0.00%	4.75%
80+	0.82%	0.00%	0.14%

Maryland Fire and EMS Service Survey
Maryland Commission to Advanced Firefighting and EMS

BLS data reports that approximately 55% of Maryland's overall workforce identifies as non-hispanic white. Each of the three operational role groupings sampled from survey responses exceeded 80% of respondents self-identifying as white. Even the most diverse group, the EMS group, reported just under 19% of respondents identifying as a race other than white.

Race as Percent of Role Group

	Volunteer	Career	EMS
White	88.72%	80.83%	81.29%
Black/African American	3.38%	6.67%	6.19%
Two or more races	1.85%	2.36%	3.17%
Asian	1.74%	0.28%	4.32%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.62%	0.97%	0.43%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.21%	0.28%	0.14%
No Response	3.49%	8.61%	4.46%

Maryland Fire and EMS Service Survey
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Ethnicity as Percent of Role Group

	Volunteer	Career	EMS
Not Hispanic or Latino	93.23%	86.81%	91.37%
Hispanic or Latino	2.36%	4.17%	3.45%
No Response	4.41%	9.03%	5.18%

Maryland Fire and EMS Service Survey
Maryland Commission to Advanced Firefighting and EMS

Educational attainment among survey respondents also varied considerably between the groups sampled. While nearly all members of Maryland's fire and EMS service reported holding at least a high school diploma, less than half of career members held a post-secondary degree. Conversely, more than half of volunteer (51%) and EMS

² US Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2022. Population Survey Labor Force Statistics, Employed persons by detailed industry and age: Justice, public order, and safety activities.

respondents (56%) held an associates degree or higher, with around 18% holding a master’s degree or another advanced degree.

Only around 10% of volunteer and career respondents reported being currently enrolled students, while more than 20% of EMS respondents reported being enrolled in school while serving. Of concurrently enrolled members, 4% of volunteers and 9% of EMS respondents reported being undergraduate students, compared to just under 3% for career respondents.

Highest Level of Educational Attainment

	Volunteer	Career	EMS
Less than a High School Diploma	1.13%	0.56%	1.15%
High School Diploma or Equivalent	17.95%	13.47%	10.36%
Professional Certification or License (No Degree)	6.67%	8.89%	7.05%
Some College (Community College or University)	22.56%	30.69%	24.89%
Associate degree	8.82%	16.53%	14.68%
Bachelor’s Degree	24.82%	25.00%	22.73%
Master’s Degree or Higher	17.54%	4.86%	18.85%

*Maryland Fire and EMS Service Survey
Maryland Commission to Advanced Firefighting and EMS*

“If you are currently an enrolled student, what is your level of enrollment”

	Volunteer	Career	EMS
High school student (grades 9-12)	1.85%	0.56%	1.15%
Community college student (two-year college/associate degree)	2.67%	4.86%	6.91%
Undergraduate student (four-year university/bachelor’s degree)	4.10%	2.92%	9.06%
Graduate student (master’s degree)	2.36%	2.08%	3.45%

*Maryland Fire and EMS Service Survey
Maryland Commission to Advanced Firefighting and EMS*

Veteran Status

	Volunteer	Career	EMS
I am a veteran	14.56%	13.33%	12.66%
I am not a veteran	84.10%	84.03%	85.32%
No Response	1.33%	2.64%	2.01%

Experience in the Fire and EMS Service

In addition to providing general demographic information, respondents were asked to provide information about specific experiences in Maryland’s fire and EMS service, e.g., where the respondent served or worked, how long they have served in any currently held roles, and experiences with training and onboarding. Finally, respondents were asked about their opinions and perceptions of their service.

In order to de-identify responses, respondents were asked to report the jurisdiction(s) where they served or worked by selecting from geographic regions that correspond to groups of Maryland counties. Responses were generally proportional to Maryland’s population distribution and the types of operational structures common in local departments. The largest number of career respondents reported working in the capital

region, defined as Montgomery and Prince George’s counties. Volunteer respondents were fairly evenly distributed across the state with higher proportions reporting from more rural and less densely populated regions in western and southern Maryland, as well as Maryland’s eastern shore. EMS respondents clustered around two regions, the Baltimore Metro area (Baltimore City and Baltimore County) and Southern Maryland region (Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary’s County) consistent with local operational structures.

Respondent Service/Work Location by Percent of Role Group

	Volunteer	Career	EMS
Capital Region	22.15%	34.31%	16.98%
Baltimore Metro	18.97%	16.81%	22.01%
Central Maryland	15.38%	16.53%	8.06%
Western Maryland	13.85%	17.08%	8.35%
Southern Maryland	14.56%	1.53%	25.61%
Upper Eastern Shore	7.38%	1.11%	7.63%
Lower Eastern Shore	3.79%	2.36%	3.74%

*Maryland Fire and EMS Service Survey
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Respondents were asked to report how long they have held their current role(s). Career respondents were nearly evenly split at 10 years of service with 49% reporting having served 10 years or less and 51% more than 10 years. Comparatively, the volunteer group, whose ages trend older, saw nearly 60% of respondents reporting more than 10 years of service. The EMS group conversely reported the shortest tenure with 64% reporting holding their current position(s) for 10 years or less.

“How long have you held your current role(s)”

Time in Current Role(s)	Volunteer	Career	EMS
< one Year	4.10%	3.33%	8.92%
1-3 Years	16.82%	11.11%	26.47%
4-10 Years	20.92%	34.58%	28.63%
11-20 Years	16.41%	31.53%	20.00%
21-30 Years	13.03%	14.44%	8.06%
30+ Years	28.21%	5.00%	7.63%

*Maryland Fire and EMS Service Survey
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Respondents were asked to consider their most recent onboarding or hiring experience and to report the general length of time between their initial application and when they began their work or service. The volunteer group reported the shortest onboarding times with 41% reporting only one to three weeks and 66% reporting less than two months. Conversely, career respondents reported significantly longer wait times with the majority (56%) waiting over six months from application to beginning service.

“For your most recent onboarding, how long did it take you from the time you applied until you began service”

	Volunteer	Career	EMS
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1 - 3 Weeks	40.62%	7.92%	33.96%
1 - 2 Months	25.74%	8.06%	27.34%
3 - 6 Months	18.77%	22.92%	20.72%
More than 6 Months	12.21%	58.75%	16.26%

Maryland Fire and EMS Service Survey
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On the topic of access to training, respondents were asked to report how costs were paid for any fire and EMS training or certifications that included a cost of tuition or fees. The majority of all three groups sampled reported that their department or employer paid the costs of their training or certification. Roughly a quarter of career and EMS respondents reported that they personally paid out-of-pocket costs for training and certification, and nearly 6% of EMS respondents reported that they received state aid or scholarship support.

“If you participated in a training or certification that had a cost, how were your costs paid”

	Volunteer	Career	EMS
My department/employer paid for me	59.59%	50.00%	54.96%
I paid for it myself (out of pocket)	13.33%	26.53%	26.04%
I received assistance from a state program/scholarship	2.67%	2.22%	5.61%

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In order to help gauge perceptions of factors that may be seen to influence recruitment, training, and retention in firefighting and EMS, respondents were asked to respond to a series of opinion statements on a scale of one to five, with one corresponding to “strongly disagree” and five corresponding to “strongly agree.” Mean values for each group were calculated and reported.

Respondents of all groups generally disagreed with the statements that, “The average person can make enough money in firefighting and/or EMS to support a family,” and “It is easy to maintain a healthy level of life-work balance in firefighting and/or EMS,” pointing to similarly reported concerns over earnings, working conditions, and outlook on the field as a career path. Interestingly, all groups also generally *disagreed* with the statement that, “In the last six months I have seriously considered leaving my department for a firefighting and/or EMS role in another department in Maryland,” indicating that most respondents had *not* seriously considered churning between opportunities in Maryland. The volunteer group voiced the strongest overall disagreement with the idea of leaving their department for another department in Maryland.

Many statements elicited generally neutral “neither agree nor disagree” responses when averaged, including perceptions on whether the fire and EMS service was inclusive for minority groups, whether the service presented opportunities for professional development, and whether departments adequately supported them with training, equipment, and policies.

Opinions on the Fire and EMS Service

Average Value Assigned by Respondents (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Statement	Volunteer	Career	EMS
The average person can make enough money in firefighting and/or EMS to support a family	2.92	2.62	2.34
I feel that there are opportunities for me to meet my personal and/or professional goals in firefighting and/or EMS	3.59	3.55	3.25
Firefighting and/or EMS workplaces are accepting and welcoming regardless of one's sex/gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religious background	3.51	3.66	3.27
It is easy to maintain a healthy level of life-work balance in firefighting and/or EMS	2.92	2.58	2.67
The best way to advance in firefighting and/or EMS is to stay with the same department	3.3	3.64	3.16
My department has adequate equipment in place to keep me safe	3.99	3.51	3.67
My department has adequate policies in place to keep me safe	3.87	3.5	3.62
The training and education I have received adequately prepared me to serve in firefighting and/or EMS	4.05	3.83	3.88
In the last six months I have seriously considered leaving my department for a firefighting and/or EMS role in another department in Maryland	1.8	2.05	2.23
I feel appreciated and respected by the people that I work or volunteer with	3.55	3.29	3.32

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Professional Values and Motivations

In addition to general opinion statements, respondents were presented with a list of 11 professional values and motivations, intended to gauge what might drive individuals to enter and remain in the fire and EMS service. Respondents were first asked to consider the values from the perspective of when they first began their service and then again from how they feel in the current moment regarding the future of their service.

Respondents provided their responses by ranking each value on a scale of one to eleven, with one representing the value that was most important to them at the given time and eleven representing the value that was least important. Responses were averaged and reported by group with a calculated change in values between when they first started and their current perception.

Professional Values and Motivations Start of Service to Today

Average Value Assigned by Respondents (1 = most important; 11 = least important)

	Volunteer			Career			EMS		
	Start	End	Change	Start	End	Change	Start	End	Change
Wages/earning potential	7.75	5.24	-2.51	4.37	3.31	-1.06	6.77	4.58	-2.19
Fringe Benefits	6.8	5.2	-1.6	3.27	3.16	-0.11	5.97	4.75	-1.22
Career Advancement	5.43	5.03	-0.4	3.77	3.91	0.14	4.36	4.26	-0.1
Commute Distance	5.45	4.86	-0.59	5.12	4.59	-0.53	4.58	4.28	-0.3
Department culture	4.1	4.06	-0.04	4.35	4.18	-0.17	3.81	3.88	0.07
Free Training	3.71	4.37	0.66	4.86	4.69	-0.17	3.61	4.28	0.67
Life/work balance	4.71	4.21	-0.5	4.04	3.77	-0.27	4.03	3.9	-0.13
Service/sense of duty	2.03	3.93	1.9	3.48	4.6	1.12	2.18	3.95	1.77
Camaraderie/belonging	2.55	3.7	1.15	3.42	4.42	1.0	2.94	3.86	0.92
Personal health/safety	3.9	4.04	0.14	4.01	4.0	-0.01	3.71	4.24	0.53
Management/leadership	3.51	4.01	0.5	3.82	4.26	0.44	3.48	3.89	0.41

*Maryland Fire and EMS Service Survey
Maryland Commission to Advanced Firefighting and EMS*

Volunteer group respondents ranked “wages and earning potential” as their lowest motivating factor both at the start of their service and as they consider their future - notably, however, while the value remained last-ranked, “wages and earning potential” rose 2.5 points in importance between start and end. This signaled an increasing concern for earnings over time. Similarly, fringe benefits (health insurance, pension, retirement options, etc.) also rose by nearly 2 points for volunteers between start and end.

Volunteers also reported that at the start of their service, the sense of duty and service to the community was the single most important factor and motivation. The sense of service value decreased between start and end, being replaced by the sense of camaraderie, fraternity, and belonging experienced within the service. While service/duty and camaraderie/belonging remained significant factors for the volunteer group, it is notable that each seemed to diminish in importance over time while economic and career factors increased in importance.

The career group identified employment fringe benefits as their consistently most influential value both at the beginning and in the present perception of their careers, with a marginal increase between start and end. The least significant value for the career group in their perception of the beginning of their career was the commute distance between work and home, while the least significant value for present perception was the availability of free training.

The largest start to end value shift for the career group was similarly the sense of duty or community service, which fell by just over one point. Camaraderie and belonging also

fell by one point, tracking with the volunteer group's shift of focus to economic factors.

Likely owing to the prevalence of EMS practitioner volunteers in the sample, EMS group values closely tracked with the volunteer group. Economic values such as earning and fringe benefits were consistently the lowest ranking factors for EMS group respondents, with wages/earning potential becoming much more important from the beginning of service to present perception (2.19 point increase). EMS group respondents also similarly value the sense of service/duty and camaraderie/belonging, with each being important motivating factors over the course of service.

Section 6: Findings of the Commission

The Maryland Commission to Advance Firefighting and EMS compiled feedback and input from State fire and EMS service leaders, reviewed assessments conducted in other states across the country, and worked to better understand issues and trends by contextualizing them with labor market data and direct input from thousands of members of Maryland's fire and EMS service.

Based on these observations, the Commission has assembled five major findings that are key to strengthening fire and EMS services in Maryland. Each warrants additional consideration and study, but presents an opportunity for reform, additional investment, and partnership.

Finding 1: Volunteer Fire and EMS roles are a critical pipeline for Maryland's Fire and EMS Service.

- Many of Maryland's firefighters and EMS practitioners began as volunteers, and many more will go on to serve as volunteers during their career or in retirement.
- With a significantly shorter onboarding process, volunteer service provides a more immediate entry-point for individuals considering fire and EMS service. This is a major recruitment advantage for the industry overall, whereas early volunteer service can lead to additional training and career progression.
- National industry surveys and other State-led assessments have also emphasized the importance of strong volunteer fire services, and the decline in overall volunteer participation rates. Reports from other states have also called for additional resources and incentives to be applied to bolstering volunteer recruitment.

Volunteer recruitment has not kept pace with attrition and retirement, and fewer younger people are choosing to become volunteer firefighters/EMS practitioners.

- The number of volunteer fire and EMS members has declined overtime.

- 68% of Maryland's volunteers are over the age of 41 and almost 10% are over the age of 71.
- Maryland lacks a sufficient and systemic means for students and young people to be connected with fire and EMS service.

Many people feel they cannot financially afford to volunteer or even work in Fire and EMS in Maryland.

- Wage and employment data indicate that Maryland's firefighters and EMS practitioners earn consistently less than the State median household income.
- Members of the fire and EMS service feel that the average worker in the industry cannot support a family on the wages they are paid.

Departments are under equipped to conduct the level of recruitment required to overcome their staffing needs

- Wages, benefits, training, and social factors such as a sense of duty, purpose, and belonging are no longer sufficiently attracting workers to fire and EMS service.
- Most departments lack the capacity or expertise to manage long-term recruitment campaigns with existing staff and incentive structures, and hiring bonuses have had mixed results in driving new hiring.
- No statewide resource or registry to help manage firefighter recruitment or career advancement exists in Maryland.

Women and people of color are underrepresented in Fire and EMS in Maryland

- People of color make up less than 20% of fire and EMS service members in Maryland, despite making up 45% of the workforce.
- Women are drastically underrepresented in all but a few roles.
- With younger generations being more diverse overall, the diversity gap in the fire and EMS service will continue to widen if the recruitment of young people continues to decline.

Section 7: Recommendations of the Commission

Building on the findings outlined in the previous section, the Commission has developed three broad recommendation areas for programmatic reforms, legislative action, and additional investment in Maryland's systems: Training and Education, Wages and Working Condition Benefits, and Financial Sustainability. Each area includes a number of discrete recommendations aimed at improving and strengthening Maryland's fire and

EMS service.

Training and Education

One of the greatest incentives to attract and retain talent is the ability for employees to grow both personally and professionally. As firefighting and EMS have become increasingly professionalized, the requirements for entry and progression have grown dependent on education and training. Education is also a powerful tool for career exposure and exploration that can lead young people into lifelong service and meaningful career opportunities.

Additionally, a notable percentage of volunteer and career members are concurrently enrolled in some form of education, primarily as community college and university students. Many others have some form of post-secondary credit but no formal degree. Bolstering the connection between education and fire and EMS service is a recommendation endorsed by the work of other states and national groups, as is providing for more accessible training and certification opportunities.

Recommendation 1: *Establish a tuition-free program for career and volunteer firefighters at Maryland's community colleges.*

Higher education has become both increasingly expensive and a significant prerequisite for entry into nearly all professions. Younger workers who previously would have found meaning and excitement as a volunteer are now turning toward white-collar professions which require college degrees. The historic pool of applicants is showing decreasing interest in fire or EMS as a worthwhile career. To better attract and retain younger cohorts of workers, it is important to offer incentives that further their education.

Maryland should consider extending tuition-free community college to active career and volunteer firefighters and EMTs. Access to free education incentivizes participation in the field while also offering a valuable personal benefit. Where possible, community colleges and universities should also explore offering housing benefits for active fire and EMS service members.

The commission found the most consensus around one potential path to structure this program:

Service Obligation – Tuition assistance could function like other public service educational programs that tie the benefit to a defined period of pre- or post-graduation service.

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges was active in this discussion and has indicated their support for this recommendation.

Recommendation 2: *Broaden scholarship and loan forgiveness resources that are currently open to police officers to firefighters and EMTs.*

In recent years, the General Assembly has created several programs to incentivize employment in law enforcement. Two of these flagship programs are the Maryland Police Officers Scholarship, which awards 50% of the equivalent annual tuition and mandatory fees of a resident undergraduate student at the eligible state institution, and the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Police Officers, which provides state assistance in the repayment of educational loans to individuals in eligible law enforcement fields serving the state of Maryland.

Maryland should recognize this sacrifice and extend firefighters and EMTs the same educational incentives enjoyed by law enforcement. Tuition assistance should be broadened by expanding the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program. Loan forgiveness should be broadened by including firefighters and EMTs in the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Police Officers and renamed the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for First Responders. All other police incentive programs and benefits should also be expanded to recognize the service of all first responders.

The State of Nebraska recently passed similar legislation ([First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act](#)) which waived 100% of resident tuition charges after financial aid for pursuing an associate or baccalaureate degree program at the University of Nebraska, colleges in the Nebraska state college system, and community colleges.

Recommendation 3: *Create State Incentives for subsidized EMS courses.*

The entry level into the statewide EMS system for most EMS Clinicians is at the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) level. To become an EMT in Maryland, individuals must successfully complete a required educational program at either a fire department training academy, a commercial ambulance service, a community college, or the Maryland Fire-Rescue Institute (MFRI). EMT education programs encompass approximately 200 hours of didactic education and practical training. Students attending fire department training academies or commercial ambulance service programs are generally employees of those entities and are compensated for their time spent in education and training. These programs enjoy a high level of student retention and success at passing the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technician (NREMT) examination that qualifies them for State certification.

In contrast, students at community colleges must pay the tuition and costs associated with the class. Also, while MFRI provides EMT education without charge, both community college and MFRI students are essentially “volunteering” their time and effort to attend and complete the required education and training sessions. Further, students’ attrition from these programs may be as high as

50%, as students may leave the programs soon after starting, after realizing the extent of commitment or academic challenge required. Moreover, those students who complete the educational requirements, but who are not successful at passing the requisite NREMT examination, can abandon their hope to become an EMT.

In the spring of 2022, MIEMSS was awarded a grant to provide stipends to EMT students who were not otherwise being compensated for attending an EMT educational program, i.e., those who were, in essence, volunteering their time to attend and complete the required EMT educational program and training. These funds were made available through the Maryland Department of Health which had received a workforce development grant through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as part of the federal response to COVID-19.

The MIEMSS Stipend Program was created to acknowledge students' sacrifices of time and effort, to motivate students to stay engaged, to incentivize satisfactory academic performance, and to sustain student interest in successfully passing the NREMT examination. A total of \$1 million was allocated to the MIEMSS Stipend Program which provided sufficient funds to support 500 EMT students with stipends of up to \$2,000 each. Funds were dispersed to EMT students in escalating increments upon achievement of standard educational program milestones. The largest payment to students (\$1,000) is made upon successful completion of the NREMT examination.

Although the MIEMSS Stipend Program was originally scheduled to end June 30, 2023, a one-year no-cost extension allows unused funds to sustain students in progress. Should a student separate from the Stipend Program before finishing educational or testing requirements, unused funds are re-allocated to award stipends to other interested individuals. Among stipend awardees, 57% were MFRI students, 34% were community college students, and 9% attended county fire department volunteer academies. The attrition rate from the MIEMSS Stipend Program is 22% -- less than what is routinely reported by EMS education programs in the state, indicating Program success at keeping many students engaged through completion of the NREMT examination.

As of mid-October 2023, MIEMSS had awarded 500+ stipends and accumulated a waiting list of more than 200 people. The rate of individuals completing the MIEMSS Stipend Program is approximately 71% and has resulted in an additional 382 individuals who successfully completed the required educational program and national certification testing and are now certified as EMTs in Maryland.

Continuing the EMT student stipend program will lead to greater retention in EMS educational programs, making available more EMTs to enter volunteer and career workforces. MIEMSS projects that continued funding for approximately 750 individuals per year is indicated, at an annual cost of \$1.5 million.

Recommendation 4: *Broaden grants for Registered Apprenticeship programs that are currently open to police officers to firefighters and EMTs*

Maryland has a number of public workforce development programs utilized across all sectors or public and private industry. One of the leading models for workforce development is Registered Apprenticeship, a structured approach to employment and training that offers full time employment, paid training, and direct mentorship and supervision by a qualified worker. Registered Apprenticeship programs are employer developed and managed and are overseen and administered by the Maryland Department of Labor. Public support programs including a state tax credit, training reimbursement, and program development grant funds are available to Registered Apprenticeship programs.

Registered Apprenticeship has advantages for employers in that it structures training and mentorship, standardizes wages and career progression, and drives recruitment and employment diversity. Registered Apprenticeship, unlike other workforce programs, is governed by federally-mandated affirmative action standards that require departments to periodically review the demographics composition of their workforce and take actionable steps to increase diversity when the workforce is found to have underrepresentation from minority groups.

While not widely used in fire and EMS, Prince George's County Fire Department operates a long running and successful Registered Apprenticeship program that has employed and graduated hundreds of workers for the County. Additionally, a survey conducted by the Maryland Department of Labor on an existing police Registered Apprenticeship program in Baltimore County found that apprentices who completed Baltimore County's apprenticeship program continued to serve with the Department for an average of 15 years. Baltimore County's Police Department apprentices were also nearly as diverse as the general workforce.

House Bill 793 – Community Safety and Strengthening Act created a nonlapsing fund for police cadet Registered Apprenticeship programs which supports grants to help departments offset the costs of operating Apprenticeship programs. The fund is currently limited to only police cadet programs. The Commission recommends legislative expansion of the fund to include fire and EMS departments as eligible recipients. Additionally, the Commission recommends that Departments consider utilizing Registered Apprenticeship programs as an inhouse recruitment and training strategy.

Recommendation 5: *Incorporate the needs of the fire and EMS service in career readiness reforms created under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and opportunities created under Maryland's new public service programs.*

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future educational reform law is creating unprecedented investment in Maryland's education systems, including a district

focus on college and career readiness and work-based learning. The Blueprint mandates that 45% of Maryland's high school graduates will complete the high school level of a Registered Apprenticeship or another industry recognized credential by the 2030-2031 school year.

While many Maryland schools offer Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs for public safety, the programs have not helped offset the decline in younger workers and volunteers entering fire and EMS service.

The Commission recommends that the Maryland State Department of Education, Blueprint Accountability and Implementation Board, and Career and Technical Education Committee all consider fire and EMS to be an in-demand career field for the purposes of designating school-based CTE resources. This may include the designation of fire and EMS certifications as industry-recognized credentials, expanded relationships between school-based CTE programs and local departments, and additional points of connections between local fire and EMS recruitment programs and school-based career coaches, counselors, and educators.

Additionally, the Commission recognizes the opportunities for connection between the fire and EMS service and the Moore administration's newly created public service programs organized under the Department of Service and Civic Innovation. The Commission seeks to promote a stronger relationship between publicly funded service programs and the experience offered within Maryland's fire and EMS service.

Wages and Working Condition Benefits

Recommendation 6: *Offer healthcare to volunteer firefighters and EMTs through state programs.*

The lack of a healthcare benefit is one of the biggest obstacles to recruiting volunteer firefighters and EMTs. In many jurisdictions, volunteer companies struggle to find adequate staff during certain hours because most of the labor pool is at work. Potential volunteers are hesitant to commit more hours because they do not want to conflict with their employment - the source of their healthcare benefits. To better incentivize volunteerism, the State should offer volunteer firefighters and EMTs the ability to purchase health insurance as if they were a state employee or provide a subsidy for volunteers who purchase their own health insurance plans.

Recommendation 7: *Establish a healthcare benefit assistance program for career and volunteer firefighters through a copay subsidy.*

Besides the hurdle of accessing quality healthcare, another challenge to many firefighters and EMTs is overcoming co-pay burdens. Depending on the plan and

household income, a co-pay from a visit to the emergency room may mean a decision between eating that week or paying for medical care. Addressing this burden would provide a significant incentive for recruitment & retention.

Partnering with counties, the State could create an opt-in co-pay assistance program for firefighters and EMTs. Some counties already provide significant assistance, but many jurisdictions would welcome additional offerings to compliment already existing benefits. A co-pay assistance program should be structured to allot firefighters and EMTs up to a \$1,500 co-pay stipend each year. Individuals would qualify based on a minimum yearly service requirement. Counties that opt into the program would split the costs equally with the State.

Based on a \$1,500 per volunteer stipend cap, the Commission estimates the subsidy would cost approximately \$28.5 million to serve the total expected number of eligible volunteers statewide.

Recommendation 8: *Establish State subsidies to offset the cost of childcare.*

Childcare is a significant barrier for parents looking to advance their careers and/or to become more active in their communities. In all corners of the State, parents are struggling with the scarcity and cost burdens of quality childcare, leaving fewer firefighters and EMTs able to answer the call. If Maryland does not act to support first responder parents, the State risks its ability to provide adequate response times and emergency care.

The strongest tool in addressing the childcare crunch is to provide direct financial assistance to fire and EMS workers. In this effort, Calvert County successfully developed a program wherein firefighters and EMTs are allotted \$500 per month toward childcare services. The State should create a similar program based on a minimum service threshold to better incentivize participation in fire and EMS.

Financial Sustainability

For the programmatic recommendations above to be adequately implemented, it is important that the State deploy sufficient resources. To that end, the Commission has developed several revenue generating recommendations.

Recommendation 9: *Allocate Revenue from Fees on Speed Camera Tickets in Construction Zones*

Construction site speed camera fines on state highways are out of sync with neighboring jurisdictions and can provide an additional revenue without tax increases. Maryland currently assesses a \$40 ticket on individuals who exceed the speed limit by 12 miles or more. Delaware assesses a base fee of \$20 plus \$1 per mile above the speed limit – as well as additional fees; Pennsylvania assesses penalties ranging from \$75-\$150 per offense; Virginia assesses penalties not to exceed \$500 per offense; and West Virginia assesses penalties

ranging from \$100-\$500 per offense.

To adequately fund the fire and EMS recruitment and retention incentives, the General Assembly could add an additional \$35 assessment to speed camera tickets on state highways. This would bring Maryland's total fine to \$75, and still be within the bottom range of what other states are assessing. This would generate between \$9 to \$16 million dollars each year.

Recommendation 10: *Review Existing State Revenues and Investments that Support Fire and EMS Operations*

Section 13-954 of the Transportation Article authorizes a vehicle registration fee surcharge in Maryland which provides crucial funding for a number of emergency medical services via the Maryland Emergency Medical Services Operations Fund (MEMSOF). Similarly, State revenues were also previously allocated to the Volunteer Company Assistance Fund (VCAF) which supports local volunteer Fire, EMS, and Rescue companies with low interest loans to replace or improve equipment and facilities.

In light of rising costs and other priorities identified in this report, The Commission recommends that the General Assembly reassess the revenues and investments that support these critical operational funds, and determine if the State's current and projected investment is sufficiently meeting Maryland's operational needs.

Recommendation 11: *Implement an Insurance Premiums Tax Allocation*

In neighboring Delaware, the state government was able to levy a two percent fee on insurance premiums at the insurance company level and direct that revenue toward investment in firefighting and EMS infrastructure. This revenue has been central in Delaware's ability to fund state-of-the-art facilities as well as provide recruitment and retention incentives. The General Assembly should explore allocating Maryland's tax on insurance premiums to local volunteer fire and EMS companies as a means of establishing an additional source of formula-assessed revenue to support fire and EMS services.