

MARY BETH CAROZZA
Legislative District 38
Somerset, Wicomico,
and Worcester Counties

Education, Energy, and
the Environment Committee

Executive Nominations Committee



Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 316
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3645 · 301-858-3645
800-492-7122 Ext. 3645
Fax 410-841-3006 · 301-858-3006
MaryBeth.Carozza@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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The Senate Budget and Taxation Pensions Subcommittee

**SB 700 – Law Enforcement Officers’ Pension System – Membership – 9-1-1
Specialists**

Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Thank you Chair Jackson and members of the distinguished Senate Pensions Subcommittee for this opportunity to present Senate Bill 700 – Law Enforcement Officers’ Pension System – Membership – 9-1-1 Specialists as amended.

This enabling legislation would provide local jurisdictions with the option to allow 911 specialists to qualify for LEOPS. The need for this bill was brought to my attention by both local law enforcement and 911 specialists as a way to retain and recruit these valuable public safety employees. As Fruitland Police Chief Krah Plunkert and other law enforcement leadership have shared with me over the years, our 911 dispatchers and operators endure many of the same stresses as our officers, and they often are the first emergency contact for the public during critical incidents and emergencies.

Our 911 specialists are an absolute lifeline for police, fire, and EMS personnel. As this Committee knows, eligibility for LEOPS covers many first responders, including Natural Resource police officers, members of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services Intelligence and Investigative Division, paramedics, and firefighters. Currently, our 911 specialists are not eligible for LEOPS retirement, despite being the first emergency contact for the public in most life and death emergencies.

Our 911 personnel are essential to our first responders, and I believe we should give local jurisdictions the option to include 911 specialists in LEOPS. Over the past two years since I first introduced this bill, I have been in communication with law enforcement officials, 911 specialists, and State Retirement and Pensions Personnel to find a solution to this growing concern among our first responders that their first responders, our 911 specialists, are not able to receive the same LEOPS benefits that many of them receive.

The bill as amended before you is mirrored after SB 368 of 2023, which was enabling legislation to allow local jurisdictions to offer LEOPS to emergency medical technicians. As you can see from the fiscal note, this bill only applies to local governments that elect to participate in LEOPS

and would not impact State level finances. SB 368 (sponsored by Senators Jackson, Bailey, Benson, Elfreth, Hettleman, Rosapepe, and Salling) unanimously passed the Senate and the House and was signed into law by Governor Moore on April 24, 2023. We need to do the same for our 911 Specialists.

I thank you for your kind attention and consideration, and I respectfully request a favorable report on SB 700.