

SB700.pdf

Uploaded by: Holley Guschke

Position: FAV

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and Committee-

I'm here today for your consideration for Senate Bill 700, authorizing 911 Specialist to become members of the Law Enforcement Officers Pension System.

911 Communication Specialist work in high-stress environments. They often receive traumatic 911 calls, must be able to make critical, lifesaving decisions, have the ability to remain calm under pressure, and work long and irregular shifts with limited control over the outcome of the 911 incident. They can experience heavy workloads, especially during peak calls times, and must juggle multiple calls at once, which can be mentally and emotionally taxing. Despite all these challenges, 911 Communication Specialists play a vital role as the first, first responder.

Due to the high stress nature of the job, the burnout rate among 911 Communication Specialists is at a high level. Studies have shown that burnout rates among 911 Communication Specialists are higher than those in many other professions. According to the National Emergency Number Association, 60% of 911 professionals reported symptoms of burnout. 911 Communication Specialist often feels unsupported and undervalued.

Recruiting 911 Communication Specialists has become increasingly difficult across the State of Maryland. Currently, all new 911 Communication Specialists in Maryland are required to obtain over 1100 hours of on-the-job training. Compared to other emergency response professions, such as law enforcement, Emergency Medical Clinicians, and Firefighters, the role of a 911 dispatcher is lesser known to the general public. This, along with the stressors of the job, can result in fewer individuals considering dispatching as a career. The stress and demands of the job often times lead to a high turnover rate. This makes it even more difficult on recruitment efforts.

Retaining a dedicated and loyal 911 Communication Specialist is key to any organization. Experienced 911 Communication Specialist have valuable knowledge that can only be gained through years of on-the-job experience. Maryland LEOPS helps attract qualified individuals and encourages experienced 911 Communication Specialist to stay in the profession. It can help attract and retain talent and has positive impacts on the local level. Also, it demonstrates the organization's commitment to supporting its employees' well-being and quality of life. Overall, Maryland LEOPS can be an important tool for managing employees, support employee well-being, and ensure the long-term needs of both the organization and 911 Communication Specialist.

These are just a few of the reasons I ask you to vote yes to Senate Bill 700. Thank you for your time and listening to our profession.

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SB0700-BT_MACo_SUP.pdf

Uploaded by: Kevin Kinnally

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 700

Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System - Membership - 9-1-1 Specialists

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Budget and Taxation Committee

Date: February 22, 2024

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 700. This bill enables local governments participating in the Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System (LEOPS) to authorize specified 9-1-1 specialists to enroll in the LEOPS program.

In 2019, the General Assembly passed Carl Henn's Law, landmark legislation to update state laws, and the 9-1-1 financing system to provide the flexibility and resources needed to deploy a statewide Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG911) system that our residents expect and deserve. As Maryland transitions to NG911, counties would appreciate the flexibility to offer 9-1-1 specialists enhanced disability and retirement benefits through the LEOPS program.

Several local governments participate in the LEOPS program, an enhanced retirement offering recognizing the peculiar rigors of work in law enforcement. Members of LEOPS earn 2.0% of their average final compensation (AFC) for each year of creditable service. Vested members qualify for a normal service retirement benefit at age 50 or with at least 25 years of creditable service.

Maryland's county governments manage, operate, and fund twenty-four public safety answering points. These answering points are vital links between 9-1-1 callers and public safety personnel. In addition to gathering essential information from callers and dispatching the appropriate first responders, 9-1-1 specialists must take control of often chaotic, heart-wrenching, stressful, confusing, and frenzied situations.

The impacts of 9-1-1 work-related stress have made it difficult for counties to recruit and retain 9-1-1 specialists. SB 700 provides another tool for counties to incentivize potential recruits and retain current employees. Further, MACo appreciates that this bill properly leaves the decision to expand employee benefits in the hands of the local governments, which are best situated to determine whether such policies are in their best interest.

Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 700.

SB 700 - Plunkert Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Krah Plunkert

Position: FAV

Testimony by Chief Krah Plunkert of the Fruitland Police Department

I want to express my most sincere support for SB 700. Our communications personnel (911 dispatchers) provide an absolutely invaluable service to police, fire, and EMS personnel as well as our communities. Our 911 dispatchers and communications specialists save lives on a regular basis and rarely are recognized for doing so. Dispatchers receive frantic calls for help and calmly translate that into a call for service. They provide lifesaving guidance such as CPR instructions, calming suicidal persons and even convincing armed suspects to disarm prior to police arrival. They simultaneously answer 911 calls, determine nature and classification for the incident, dispatch the call for service to the law enforcement officer, and maintain communication with the caller while remaining focused on the law enforcement officers response and safety. Our dispatchers are a lifeline to the public and our first responders. Having been in law enforcement for over 35 years, I can recall countless times that the radio dispatcher has significantly reduced the chances of an officer being injured or killed in the line of duty. The common saying within law enforcement is the “dispatcher will always have my six”.

One of the most overlooked topics in the first responder community is the contributions of our dispatchers. They are seldom paid what they are worth, and they are generally not eligible for a comparable retirement. It needs to be acknowledged that our dispatchers experience many of the same stressors **that we as** Law Enforcement officers experience. They too experience the rapid pulse, increased blood pressure, anxiety, sleep pattern disruptions caused by rotating shifts, and lost family time during holidays. When people’s lives are on the line, or an officer fails to answer their radio or they’re in a life-threatening situation, our dispatchers feel the same responses as those personnel on the scene.

SB 700 goes a long way in recognizing the contributions of our dispatchers **which will** create an eligible career path with a **sustainable** retirement, rather than just a job. This bill models the same bill unanimously passed into law to allow the Salisbury Fire Department to participate in LEOPS (SB 504 of 2004) **and** the bill unanimously passed into law **just last year** to allow emergency medical technicians to participate in LEOPS (SB 368 of 2023). The passage of this bill will enhance the ability to recruit and retain qualified members of our law enforcement community. The increased quality and longevity of our dispatchers will greatly impact the quality of service to the Citizens of Maryland. Please support SB700. Thank you.

SB700.pdf

Uploaded by: Mike McKay

Position: FAV

MIKE MCKAY
Legislative District 1
Garrett, Allegany, and Washington Counties



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Judicial Proceedings Committee
Executive Nominations Committee

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 3, 2024

RE: Fire/EMS Coalition Support for Senate Bill 700

Dear Chairman Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Committee,

The Fire/EMS Coalition would like to express their support for Senate Bill 700: Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System - Membership - 9-1-1 Specialists. The bill will authorize certain individuals who are employed as 9-1-1 specialists and certified by the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to become members of the Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System as employees of a participating governmental unit.

The Fire/EMS Coalition supports Senate Bill 700 as it will be beneficial to those who work as 9-1-1 specialists to receive the benefits they deserve as part of their pension. Our 9-1-1 operators work diligently to keep our community safe and the Coalition supports this important effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike McKay".

Senator Mike McKay
Representing the Appalachia Region of Maryland
Serving Garrett, Allegany, and Washington Counties

Voting Organizations:

Maryland Fire Chief's Association (MFCA)
Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA)
State Fire Marshal (OSFM)
Maryland Fire Rescue Institute (MFRI)
Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services System (MIEMMS)
Metro Fire Chief's Association
Professional Firefighters of Maryland

Our Mission Statement

The Maryland Fire/EMS Coalition unites Republicans and Democrats in support of fire/emergency services legislation that benefit all first responders. Becoming a member does not require taking positions on legislation; rather Coalition members are asked to offer support in a way that best benefits fire/emergency services in their respective Legislative Districts.

SB 700 - Tanner Jones Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Richard Tanner Jones

Position: FAV

911 Specialist Supervisor Richard Tanner Jones

[Fruitland Police Department- Emergency Communications]

I am writing in strong support of SB 700 – Law Enforcement Officers’ Pension System – Membership – 911 Specialists.

Since joining the Public Safety Sector in 2011 at the age of 18, there has been no other job path considered. This is my calling. This is a job that I love, however with current retirement requirements I will have to work a total of 42 years, 12 years above my 30 years of service. 42 years listening to people die on the phone, officers screaming for help, is a long time.

With the potential to enter LEOPS, I would be able to retire after serving 30 years, and I would be able to retire at a higher percentage. This is an absolute necessity for retention and recruitment for future dispatchers, who would be entering a stressful but worthwhile profession in public safety. This option to allow Emergency Communications Personnel eligible for LEOPS would prevent the Dispatcher Burnout that so many face and would give a higher benefit at the end of a very rewarding career.

Please support SB 700.

SB 700 - Carozza Testimony_FINAL.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Position: FAV

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

Education, Energy, and
the Environment Committee

Executive Nominations Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 22, 2024

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.

SB 700 testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Robert Phillips

Position: FWA

MARYLAND STATE FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION

REPRESENTING THE VOLUNTEER FIRE, RESCUE, AND EMS PERSONNEL OF MARYLAND.



Robert P. Phillips

Chairman

Legislative Committee

17 State Circle

Annapolis, MD 21401

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SB 700: Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System – Membership – 9-1-1 Specialists

My name is Robert Phillips, I am the Legislative Committee Chair for the Maryland State Firefighters Association (MSFA). The MSFA represents the 25,000 plus volunteer Fire/EMS and Rescue first responders across the state.

I wish to present testimony in favor of Senate Bill 700: Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System – Membership – 9-1-1 Specialists

The MSFA supports this legislation with an amendment. The amendment that we propose is to remove the requirement that the dispatcher is required to be "CERTIFIED BY THE MARYLAND POLICE TRAINING AND STANDARDS COMMISSION AS A LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER. The majority of 9-1-1 specialists in this state do not hold this certification and are not required to do so.

The MSFA feels that the 9-1-1 specialists are the first link in the chain of first responders. They receive the calls for assistance and start in motion the events that provide help and relief for the public during times of emergency. Without the 9-1-1 specialists the first responders in the field would not be able to do their jobs as efficiently and serve the public as 9-1-1 specialists are our lifeline to the many assets needed in the field.

This addition to the pension plan will be another tool in the toolbox to recruit and retain 9-1-1 specialists for now and the future.

I thank the committee for their time and attention to this important bill and ask that you vote favorable on Senate Bill 700.

I will now be glad to answer any questions, or my contact information is listed above and welcome any further inquiries you might have.

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 700 LEOPS 9

Uploaded by: Anne Gawthrop

Position: UNF



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MARYLAND
STATE RETIREMENT
and PENSION SYSTEM

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TTY Users: call via Maryland Relay
sra.maryland.gov

**Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 700
Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System - Membership - 9-1-1 Specialists
Senate Budget and Tax Committee
February 22, 2024
8:30 A.M.**

**Anne Gawthrop
Director of Legislative Affairs
State Retirement Agency**

The Board of Trustees for the State Retirement and Pension System (System) wishes to express its opposition to Senate Bill 700, Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System - Membership - 9-1-1 Specialists.

Senate Bill 700 allows 9-1-1 specialists employed by a participating governmental unit to participate in the Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System (LEOPS) if their employer joins the LEOPS. Additionally, the 9-1-1 specialist must be certified by the Maryland Police Training Standards Commission as a law enforcement officer.

Currently, individuals serving as 9-1-1 specialists participate in the Employees' Pension System (EPS), if their employer participates in the EPS as a participating governmental unit. Eligibility for retirement in the EPS is either age 62 with five years of service if the member commenced service in the EPS prior to July 1, 2011, or age 65 with 10 years of service if the member commenced service in the EPS on or after July 1, 2011. Eligibility for retirement in the LEOPS is age 50 with five years of service if the member commenced service in the LEOPS prior to July 1, 2011, or age 50 with 10 years of service if the member commenced service in the LEOPS on or after July 1, 2011. Additionally, a member of LEOPS may also be eligible to retire after accruing 25 years of service, regardless of age or when the member was enrolled in the LEOPS.

The technical definition for "normal retirement age" as provided for by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) states that it is the age that is not earlier than the earliest age that is reasonably representative of the typical retirement age for the industry in which the covered workforce is employed. The IRS has issued proposed regulations that address the definition of normal service retirement age for qualified governmental pension plans, specifically addressing normal retirement age for public safety officers.

The IRS proposed regulations provide that a normal retirement age under a governmental plan would be permissible if the period of service used is reasonable and uniformly applicable, and a normal retirement age lower than age 65 represents the age at which employees customarily retire in the industry. Additionally, the proposed regulations include several sets of safe harbors which would allow for a normal service retirement age lower than age 65, with specific safe harbors for qualified public safety employees. For these employees, the proposed safe harbors are:

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- age 50;
- combined age and years of service totaling 70 or more; or
- any age with 20 years of service.

Section 72(t)(10)(B) of the Internal Revenue Code defines a qualified public safety employee as any employee of a state or political subdivision of a state who provides police protection, firefighting services, or emergency medical services for any area within the jurisdiction of such state or political subdivision.

In the absence of final regulations, governmental plans must continue to comply with pre-ERISA vesting requirements. Under those rules, the normal retirement age is ordinarily age 65, and a plan may specify a lower age only if this lower age would be an age which employees customarily retire in the particular industry.

Senate Bill 700 is a reintroduction of Senate Bill 822 from the 2022 legislative session. At that time, tax counsel for the System reviewed the definition of a 9-1-1 specialist under §1-301(n) of the Public Safety Article, which includes language stating that a 9-1-1 specialist's duties include:

- receiving and processing 9-1-1 requests for emergency services;
- other support functions directly related to 9-1-1 requests for emergency services; or
- dispatching law enforcement officers, fire rescue services, emergency medical services, and other public safety services to the scene of an emergency.

After reviewing this definition, the System's tax counsel expressed concern that these duties would not satisfy the definition of a qualified public safety employee under I.R.C. § 72(t)(10)(B). Additionally, there was a concern that providing 9-1-1 specialists a normal retirement at age 50 or after accruing 25 years of service, regardless of age, is not consistent with the normal retirement age at which other equivalent positions (other non-qualified public safety employees) customarily retire in the industry. The System's tax counsel also reviewed the provision included in the 2022 legislation that provided that a 9-1-1 specialist eligible to participate in LEOPS must be certified by the Maryland Police Training Standards Commission as a law enforcement officer. The Agency was advised that law enforcement officer certification, alone, would not be sufficient to meet the definition of a qualified public safety employee under I.R.C. § 72(t)(10)(B). To meet this definition, the individual would have to actually be performing the duties of a law enforcement officer. The System's tax counsel has reviewed Senate Bill 700 and reported that their 2022 advice remains unchanged.

Based on this advice, we believe that permitting 9-1-1 specialists to receive a normal retirement after reaching age 50 or after accruing 25 years of service, regardless of age, would violate the I.R.S. proposed regulations addressing normal retirement age. Therefore, adding 9-1-1 specialists who do not meet the definition of "qualified public safety employees," will present tax qualification issues for the System.

We appreciate being given the opportunity to raise these issues with the Committee and stand ready to provide any further information or services the Committee might request regarding Senate Bill 700.