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Education, Energy, and
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Executive Nominations Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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The Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
SB 1034 – 9-1-1 Specialist Recruitment and Retention Workgroup
Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Thank you Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and my fellow members of the esteemed Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee for this opportunity to present Senate Bill 1034 – 9-1-1 Specialist Recruitment and Retention Workgroup. I want to thank Vice Chair Kagan for all of her assistance with this legislation and all of her suggested recommendations have been included in SB 1034.

For the past three years, I have been working with Fruitland Police Chief Plunkert, other local law enforcement, and 9-1-1 Specialists in an effort to allow 9-1-1 Specialists to qualify for the Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System. This would be a major recruitment and retention tool to support our 9-1-1 Specialists. Last week, I introduced and the Senate Budget and Taxation Pensions Subcommittee heard Senate Bill 700 which would give local jurisdictions the option to allow 9-1-1 specialists to qualify for LEOPS. This legislation mirrors SB 368 of 2023 that allowed local jurisdictions to offer LEOPS to emergency medical technicians and was unanimously passed by the Maryland General Assembly last session and signed into law on April 24, 2023. We currently are working with our federal partners to add 9-1-1 Specialists to the definition of "qualified public safety employees" in order for the LEOPS option to go forward for 9-1-1 specialists.

My purpose in sharing this background brings you to Senate Bill 1034 which is focused on a long-term approach in the recruitment and retention of Maryland's 9-1-1 Specialists. This legislation establishes a 9-1-1 Specialist Recruitment and Retention Workgroup to identify and examine recruitment and retention challenges that affect 9-1-1 Specialists in Maryland and make related recommendations. This workgroup approach is similar to the workgroups that the Maryland General Assembly has established for fire and emergency medical services personnel, and for law enforcement. The expectation is that the 9-1-1 Specialists Workgroup will make legislative, budgetary, and other recommendations that will strengthen the recruitment and retention of 9-1-1 specialists.

Our 911 Specialists are an absolute lifeline for police, fire, and EMS personnel and are often overlooked for the important role they play in maintaining public safety. A 911 Specialist is often the first emergency contact for the public in most life and death emergencies. Dispatchers receive frantic calls for help and while remaining calm for the person in distress, determine the nature and classification of the incident in order to provide lifesaving service. They often give CPR instructions, calm individuals contemplating suicide, dispatch the call for service to police, fire, or EMS personnel, and even convince armed suspects to disarm prior to police arrival.

Our 911 dispatchers and operators endure many of the same stresses our officers do, except they do not get closure. Once the cavalry arrives, they are already on the next call, beginning the next lifesaving mission.

Holley Goschke, 911 Division Chief for Talbot County Department of Emergency Services, testified last week that recruiting 911 Communication Specialists has become increasingly difficult across the State of Maryland due to a high burnout rate, the stress and perception of being unsupported and undervalued, and the high number of hours of on-the-job training they are required to complete before being considered full 911 Specialists. These issues impede the ability for the 911 Specialist profession to recruit and retain dedicated people who are desperately needed at these posts.

Senate Bill 1034 is cosponsored by Senator Michael Jackson, Senate Pensions Subcommittee Chair, and Senator Mike McKay, Chair of the Maryland General Assembly's Fire/EMS Coalition. The bill is supported by the Maryland Firefighters Association, the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services System (MIEMMS) and the other voting members of the Fire/EMS Coalition.

I respectfully request a swift and favorable report of Senate Bill 1034 to strengthen recruitment and retention of Maryland's 9-1-1 specialists, the first responders for our first responders.