



Senate Bill 578

*Professional and Volunteer Firefighter Innovative Cancer
Screening Technologies Program - Funding*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Budget and Taxation Committee

Date: February 7, 2024

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 578. This bill allocates additional resources to the Professional and Volunteer Firefighter Innovative Cancer Screening Technologies Program.

For the second legislative session in a row, MACo has adopted as a legislative initiative to support forward-thinking Firefighter and EMS incentives. While Maryland beats the national average in 9-1-1 call response times, a growing number of communities are starting to slip below that average and with detrimental consequences. **This effectively means that a growing number of the mutual state and county constituents are being put in danger due to a lack of emergency response capacity.**

The 2023 report from the Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and Emergency Medical Services within Maryland (the Commission) identified healthcare, along with education and childcare, as the top incentives to encourage more individuals to join and remain with firefighting as a career. By raising the threshold of minimum funding for the Professional and Volunteer Firefighter Innovative Cancer Screening Technologies Program, the General Assembly would be taking real action to support our first responders.

It also must be noted that while SB 578 is an important step, it does not go far enough. MACo is advancing legislation aimed at implementing and furthering the discussion around several recommendations within the Commission's report. SB 691/HB 899 establish and expand educational incentives for fire and EMS personnel, while also directing the Department of Budget and Management to report on the feasibility of future healthcare and childcare programs. Make no mistake, if Maryland does not take further action soon, our constituents will bear the brunt of those decisions.

Counties believe firefighter recruitment and retention should be a priority for all levels of government and as such, urge the Committee to give SB 578 a **FAVORABLE** report.