

Good Afternoon,

I'm Colin Campbell, an Assistant State's Attorney representing Howard County State's Attorney Rich Gibson, and the Maryland State's Attorney's Association. I'm here to express strong support for H.B. 321, and extend my gratitude to Delegate Dalya Attar for sponsoring this crucial bill, as well as to Chair Clippinger and Vice Chair Bartlett for this hearing.

As an ASA since 2018 I've prosecuted criminal cases including arsons. I've been a volunteer firefighter at the Providence Volunteer Fire Company in Baltimore County for over 15 years and have completed the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute's Fire Investigator course, bringing a unique perspective to the table.

This bill seeks to remedy a significant gap in our legal system. The inherently dangerous profession of Firefighting and the Firefighters, who willingly place themselves in harm's way to protect lives and property. The reclassification of Arson 1 in 2022 by the Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy noted the substantial risk of harm posed to both dwelling inhabitants and first responders.ⁱ

From 2013 to 2022, ATF Bomb Arson Tracking System data reveals 35 reported injuries to firefighters during the suppression of fires classified as arsons in Maryland.ⁱⁱ In the past two years alone I've handled 3 arson cases in Howard County resulting in Firefighter injury.

Currently, there is no mechanism by which to seek justice for a firefighter injured or killed in the line of duty due to an intentionally set arson. Assault and Reckless Endangerment do not adequately encompass these scenarios. Ultimately leaving the State without any means of seeking justice for an injured victim.

This bill seeks to create that mechanism, allowing Maryland prosecutors to seek justice for our injured victims who would not have even responded but for the criminal actions of the arsonist.

By holding arsonists accountable for the injuries they cause, the State can provide accountability, justice, and protection to the victims and their families while ensuring arsonists face appropriate consequences. Additionally, this legislation acts as a further deterrent toward eliminating the use of fire-setting for criminal goals.

In conclusion, I appreciate your time and attention to this matter. I am here to seek a favorable report from the committee on H.B. 321, which will contribute to ensuring the safety and well-being of our firefighters. Thank you.

ⁱ *Offense Type Reclassification for Arson, 1st Degree*, Guidelines E-News Vol. 17, No. 3 (Md. ST. COMMISSION ON CRIM. SENT'G POL'Y), Oct. 2022, at 1, <https://msccsp.org/news/>.

ⁱⁱ ATF, Maryland Fire Fighter Injury and Death – Incendiary (2023), <https://www.atf.gov/explosives/bomb-arson-tracking-system-bats>.