



Senate Bill 124

Employment Standards – Firefighters – Payment of Wages and Payroll Information

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Finance Committee

Date: January 16, 2025

From: Karrington Anderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 124. This bill would eliminate local bargaining authority over firefighter schedules and overtime policies and instead establish a statewide mandate for uniform schedules and overtime policies. SB 124 is a one-size-fits-all approach that threatens to undermine local firefighting operations, place an undue financial burden on county governments, and compromise emergency response services for Maryland residents.

Firefighter schedules, hours, and overtime are currently – and properly – among the topics collectively bargained between the local government and the employee representatives. In some jurisdictions, where the employees have prioritized a work schedule that leads to 42 or 40 hours per week, the bargaining process has allowed the county government to secure other trade-offs to make the needed service levels affordable. SB 124 fails to do this by substituting the State's judgment on this single element, overriding any locally negotiated provisions, and arbitrarily imposing an overtime standard with no regard to any offsets that could have been bargained.

By mandating uniform policies across the state, SB 124 would negate existing collective bargaining agreements to the detriment of firefighters, county governments, and Maryland residents. The bill would shift all firefighting units to a 42-hour work week, with anything over that being considered overtime. Additionally, and concerning, SB 124 would count any expended paid leave toward the mandated 42-hour work week standard.

Doing so would result in less coverage at any given time to respond to emergencies and/or the need to hire a significant number of firefighters to fill labor shortages, resulting from restricting the work week to 42 hours. In Frederick County alone, this would mean hiring nearly 100 more employees when hiring and retaining career and volunteer firefighters is already extremely challenging in Maryland and nationwide.

Alternatively, counties would be forced to pay exorbitant overtime wages to maintain existing levels of emergency services. This would be a significant financial challenge for counties, and it may even be untenable. Furthermore, similar overtime policies in public safety have not proven prudent or financially sound.

SB 124 would create unintended consequences that could weaken emergency services and impose untenable costs on county governments. For these reasons, MACo **OPPOSES** SB 124 and urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report.