

Written Testimony in Support of Maryland Senate Bill 124

Submitted by: Zachary Morrell, Firefighter/FAO, Washington County, MD, Member of IAFF Local 1605

To: Maryland Senate Finance Committee

Hearing Date: January 16, 2025

Chairperson and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Zachary Morrell, and I am a Firefighter/Fire Apparatus Operator serving Washington County, Maryland. I am also a proud member of IAFF Local 1605, representing the professional firefighters who protect and serve our community. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 124, which seeks to address long-standing inequities in how firefighters are compensated for overtime and improve transparency in payroll practices.

Like many firefighters in Maryland, I work a 48-hour workweek. Despite this, the current policy in Washington County requires me and my colleagues to work over 106 hours in a 14-day period before qualifying for overtime pay. This means we must average a 53-hour workweek to earn overtime. In stark contrast, the majority of other employees in Washington County receive overtime pay for any hours worked beyond 40 in a single week. This discrepancy devalues the commitment and sacrifices of firefighters, who often put themselves in harm's way to protect the lives and property of Maryland residents.

Firefighters are called to act without hesitation in the face of danger—whether it's rushing into a burning building, responding to hazardous material incidents, or providing life-saving medical care. We do this willingly and with pride. However, it is deeply disheartening that our financial security and the well-being of our families are often treated as an afterthought by local, state, and federal governments because it is the cheaper option.

The challenges created by unfair compensation policies are not just theoretical—they have real-world consequences. We are currently witnessing a tragic fire in Los Angeles, where staffing shortages are a major concern. Understaffing and undervaluing firefighters

ultimately jeopardize public safety. Senate Bill 124 provides Maryland with an opportunity to prevent similar crises by ensuring firefighters are compensated fairly, making it more likely that highly trained and experienced professionals will remain in Maryland to serve our communities.

This bill is about more than overtime pay—it is about equity, fairness, and respect. By passing SB 124, you will send a clear message to Maryland's firefighters that their dedication is recognized, their sacrifices are appreciated, and their financial security matters. It will also help strengthen Maryland's ability to recruit and retain the skilled firefighters needed to protect our citizens.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 124 and stand with the firefighters who stand ready to protect Marylanders every day. Thank you for your time, attention, and commitment to ensuring that Maryland remains a safer and stronger state.

Respectfully submitted,

Zachary Morrell

Firefighter/FAO, Washington County, MD

Member, IAFF Local 1605