

## Written Testimony of Erik Gaull supporting SB148 (Supporting our 9-1-1 Specialists Act)

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and other members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee – I write in support of SB148, the Supporting our 9-1-1 Specialists Act.

My name is Erik Gaull, and I am a Montgomery County resident. Although I am a member of the Maryland 9-1-1 Board, I am writing today as a private citizen, as a volunteer firefighter/paramedic with 40 years of service to the citizens of Montgomery County and as reserve officer in the D.C. Police Department with over 36 years of law enforcement experience.

In my experience, the 9-1-1 specialists – who receive the calls from distraught citizens and who dispatch and communicate with field-based first responders – are the forgotten *first* first responders. They play a crucial role in getting the information field-based first responders need in order to do their jobs safely and effectively. 9-1-1 specialists are *literally* our lifeline. Without their diligent, compassionate, and highly skilled service, we in the field would be rudderless and without access to the additional resources we may need on any given emergency scene to render the care we need to deliver or get us the help we require to save *our* lives!

9-1-1 specialists operate behind the scenes, out of the limelight. With rare exception, they go unnoticed and without recognition. The stresses to which they are subject – as the initial point of contact for the public with the emergency response system and as the people field responders rely upon to communicate life-saving information to us and to safeguard our well-being – are every bit as real and powerful as the stresses field-based first responders feel. As a field-based responder, I deal with devastating and traumatic events, but I get to return to a fire station and get some distance from what I witnessed and some rest or food to enable me to deal with whatever comes next. By contrast, the second a 9-1-1 specialist hangs up with a caller, the automatic call distribution system in their public safety answering point routes them another call – often within seconds. They don't have time to decompress. They have to be "on their game" again – because the public depends on them and because we in the field depend on them.

It seems only fair that the service of 9-1-1 specialists is recognized on a par with field-based first responders. It is the very least we Marylanders can do for the people who work around the clock, behind the scenes, keeping us safe – just as field-based responders do.

I urge you to pass SB148, which would create a retirement tax credit for 9-1-1 specialists. It is the right thing to do.