

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2024 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**Third Reader**

House Bill 975 (Delegate Otto)

Environment and Transportation

Education, Energy, and the Environment

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**Somerset County – Fire, Rescue, and Emergency Medical Services**

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This bill authorizes the Somerset County Commissioners to enact local laws and adopt measures for effective management and regulation of fire, rescue, and emergency medical services in the county. The bill also authorizes the county commissioners to establish an entity or body to administer the county’s affairs relating to fire, rescue, and emergency medical services and associated activities while maintaining the volunteer emergency services. If the county commissioners elect to do this, they must also establish an Emergency Services Advisory Council to provide the county commissioners with recommendations regarding the operations of fire suppression, emergency medical, and hazardous materials services in the county.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** None.

**Local Effect:** The bill does not materially affect Somerset County operations or finances.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Current Law:** The Somerset County Commissioners do not have specific authority to establish an emergency services advisory council. The Public Local Laws of Somerset County require the county commissioners to appropriate funds to organized volunteer fire companies in the county. Appropriations made by the county commissioners to volunteer fire companies were last changed by Chapters 327 and 328 of 2018, which increased funding for fiscal 2019 through 2024. Chapters 327 and 328 also required that

the fiscal 2024 funding levels remain the same for each year thereafter, unless changed by legislation. There are eight organized volunteer fire companies in Somerset County.

The county commissioners may also appropriate funds annually for emergency services provided by any volunteer fire company or rescue squad if the volunteer fire company or rescue squad is operated on a not-for-profit basis.

Additionally, the public local laws of Somerset County authorized the county commissioners to establish a fire marshal office in the county. The fire marshal must be appointed and compensated by the county commissioners and may be removed for incompetence, neglect, or other reasons.

The fire marshal may inspect buildings to discover fire hazards and to enforce the regulations adopted by the county commissioners. The county commissioners may create regulations to safeguard the public from fire hazards in all buildings in the county. These regulations may provide for the repair or removal of dangerous structures, trash removal, and the removal of other materials that may increase fire hazards or hinder a firemen's efficiency in extinguishing fires or in preventing the spread of fires.

The fire marshal must enforce the regulations adopted, order the removal of any fire hazard, and make any repairs and improvement to ensure compliance with the regulations. The fire marshal must also report to the county commissioners all violations of the regulations and the names of all persons who refuse to comply with the fire marshal's orders for the repair and removal of fire hazards.

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### **Additional Information**

**Recent Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

**Designated Cross File:** SB 807 (Senator Carozza) - Education, Energy, and the Environment.

**Information Source(s):** Somerset County; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 21, 2024  
rh/tso Third Reader - March 18, 2024

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Analysis by: Valarie P. Munroe

Direct Inquiries to:  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510