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Chair, Training and Staffing Sub-Committee
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Written Testimony In Favor of Senate Bill 838

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of Senate Bill 838. This legislation is an important effort to provide the highest level of 9-1-1 services throughout Maryland.

Since the first 9-1-1 call was placed more than fifty years ago, 9-1-1 services and the related technology have evolved. The evolutionary processes in Maryland have been consistently focused on meeting the needs and expectations of Maryland's residents and its first responders. The changes include enhanced training processes, the use of dispatch protocols, improved cell phone location functionality, and changes to the 9-1-1 funding calculations. As with other important public safety efforts, 9-1-1 functionality continues to improve and evolve.

It has been my honor to serve on the Commission to Advance Next Generation 9-1-1 Across Maryland over the past two years. This incredible collection of legislators and public safety professionals have compiled a series of recommendations to ensure 9-1-1 is able to provide the best emergency services possible throughout Maryland. The recommendations compiled by the Commission reinforces the understanding that we need to continue with the forward momentum that was initiated in legislation that was enacted last year.

Thanks to your support, last year's legislation provided for enhanced funding in support of the 9-1-1 services provided to Maryland's citizens and residents, interoperability mandates for Next Generation 9-1-1 systems, and recognition of Maryland's 9-1-1 Specialists as public safety personnel.

In the near future, 9-1-1 Centers throughout Maryland will have the ability to receive text, video, photography, sound, and other recorded multi-media information as well as voice appeals for emergency assistance. This move to the Next Generation of 9-1-1 (NG911) will allow for improved location capabilities to persons requesting assistance. It will also bring about other benefits designed to give all first responders the opportunity to provide a higher level of emergency services to Maryland's residents and visitors.

The legislation we are here to support reflects the technical aspects of this transition to NG911 and requires foundational improvements in the training and call processing requirements for our 9-1-1 Specialists. With the changes on the horizon, these enhancements are crucial to meeting the challenges that NG911 will bring about. The legislation also recognizes the human aspect of 9-1-1 and the understanding that one of the most important aspects of the 9-1-1 process is the personnel receiving and processing these calls.

Each day, 9-1-1 Centers throughout Maryland receive thousands of telephone calls requesting emergency services. These emergencies may range from reports of a life-threatening illness, someone trapped in a housefire, or a crime in progress. With each of these calls, the public places their trust in the person on the other end of the phone. The public trusts that each person has been trained to provide the necessary services, trusts that the technology that is being used will allow the Specialist to locate them, and trusts that the 9-1-1 Specialist will provide lifesaving information while the first responders are enroute.

The components of this proposed legislation fortify this trust and ensures all 9-1-1 Specialists are prepared to support the public in their time of need.

I can personally attest to dependence on the 9-1-1 Specialist for life saving information, caring responses, and immediate assistance when I had to call 9-1-1 for assistance during a serious asthma attack. Although I knew what was going on in the background and why the questions were being asked, I was just scared and wanted help as quickly as possible. With the improvements associated with this legislation we will be able to provide help to other people that are scared and want help as quickly as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information and to encourage support of this important legislation.