



**HOWARD COUNTY PROFESSIONAL  
FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION  
I.A.F.F. LOCAL 2000**

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TO: The Honorable Delegate Dereck E. Davis, Chair  
Members, House Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Richard L. Ruehl, President  
Howard County Professional Fire Fighters Association

DATE: February 26, 2021

RE: **FAVORABLE, WITH AMENDMENTS** – House Bill 1199 – Workers’ Compensation –  
Occupational Disease Presumptions – COVID-19

The Howard County Professional Fire Fighters Association, representing more than 440 active and retired professional fire fighters and paramedics who proudly serve the citizens of Howard County, Maryland, wish to offer our support, with amendments, House Bill 1199.

Our members have borne the lion’s share of first arrival, direct contact patient care of COVID-19 positive and COVID-19 suspected patients. Many of our members have ultimately tested positive for COVID-19 themselves or have been quarantined – sometimes on multiple occasions – due to suspicion of COVID-19 infection. This is an unavoidable hazard of our careers.

We cannot thank Delegate Valderrama and the other legislators who have filed COVID-19 presumption legislation enough for their efforts on behalf of fire fighters and paramedics throughout the State of Maryland. Your support is very much appreciated.

There is one concerning portion of HB 1199 we wish to provide some clarity on, that being the rebuttability language as it appears in lines 2-4 on page 6 of the bill. The issue of rebuttability for presumptions has already been addressed through judicial interpretation and does not appear elsewhere in Section 9-503 of the Workers’ Compensation statute. Adding rebuttability language for COVID-19 could lead to arguments from employers that because such language was added with respect to COVID-19, it must mean the legislature intended it to be more restrictive than the current judicially interpreted rebuttability. This could ultimately mean that the COVID-19 presumption is negated and ineffective.

We request an amendment to remove the rebuttability language as proposed in section (G)(4) on page 6 of the bill in order to prevent this well-intentioned and important coverage for fire fighters and paramedics to be rendered nearly toothless.

On behalf of the members of the Howard County Professional Fire Fighters Association, we encourage a favorable, with amendment, report on House Bill 1199.

Submitted respectfully,

Richard L. Ruehl, President  
IAFF Local 2000