

Chief Richard K. Brooks, III
[Cecil County Director of Emergency Services, Retired]
Senate Bill 658 -- Wednesday, February 17, 2021 at 1pm
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
SUPPORT

Even though I'm on vacation, I am taking time to share my strong support for SB658. As a former member of the Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG911) Commission, I understand the importance of this modest government reorganization related to public safety. Specifically, the proposed legislation would shift the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to an independent agency, reporting directly to the Governor. And, it will remove the 9-1-1 Board from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) and house it under MEMA.

Some of you with grey hair (or no hair like me!) may remember the days of Civil Defense. You might even be old enough to recall air raid drills or sirens atop schools that sounded every Monday at 1:00 pm. Retired soldiers were the custodians of underground bunkers where water, crackers, and candy were stored for the population. There's a scene in the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life," where Jimmy Stewart is shown as a Warden. *That* was Civil Defense.

Now, Emergency Management is a cutting-edge field in our governments. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) relies on each states' Emergency Management Agencies as conduits to our local communities. Significant funding flows through this channel, allowing for preparedness and mitigation.

Emergency Management is no longer in the basement of an old building. It is on the front lines of coordinating protection from a variety of hazards and threats. In just the last few years, think of the disasters that have torn across our State-- hurricanes, blizzards, floods, tornados, and civil unrest-- to name a few. All of this was managed and coordinated by the Emergency Management Agencies in each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions.

The Governor regularly consults with the Executive Director of MEMA. However, the agency is still housed under the Military Department. Remember, when the Governor activates the National Guard, the coordination of their efforts and assignments is made by the Emergency Managers.

The time has come to upgrade MEMA to a Cabinet-level entity. This would provide the visibility it deserves and enhance its function, while also bringing the Maryland 9-1-1 Board (currently under DPSCS) to a place where it can work more easily with other public safety agencies with expertise in emergency services.

Over the past couple of years, you have enacted legislation based on recommendations from myself and my colleagues on the NG911 Commission to support our 9-1-1 systems. Shifting the 9-1-1 Board out of Corrections and placing it with Emergency Management provides an obvious partnership. MEMA's Director has already offered to provide service

and support in the areas of human resources (recruiting, training, and retaining of 9-1-1 Specialists), webpage maintenance, and procurement as needed.

As the funds committed to the 9-1-1 Board continue to be disbursed for key safety projects in each county, it makes sense that the responsible agency is entrenched in the local effort as well. MEMA is the contact point for all agencies in times of emergency, and through the Maryland Joint Operations Center, the State has the ability to provide 24/7 communication and coordination with these state and local agencies.

Therefore, today, we look to place the days of Civil Defense behind us and bring the Maryland Emergency Management Agency into the leadership role it deserves. At the same time, we must provide an appropriate place for the Maryland 9-1-1 Board to function and flourish in the Next Generation 9-1-1 environment.

Thank you for your time. **I urge your favorable report on SB 658.**