

CAROLINE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

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SENATE BILL 68

Maryland Department of Emergency Management - Establishment

Position: **SUPPORT**

Date: January 28, 2021

To: Education, Health & Environmental Affairs
Budget and Taxation

I am writing to urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 68, Maryland Department of Emergency Management – Establishment. This bill, if passed, will have a tremendous positive impact on every Marylander by creating a standalone emergency management department whose sole focus is a more prepared, resilient state.

As a local emergency manager, it would be easy for me to point to the coordination of emergency response throughout the state as the reason to create the Maryland Department of Emergency Management. Anyone living through COVID-19 understands the critical role emergency management plays in emergency response, and it is an easy argument to make that the organization responsible for coordinating emergencies like the COVID-19 response should have a direct, unfiltered line to the Governor in order to provide the most salient advice and recommendations for action in the most expeditious manner. This point has been underscored by failures of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, moved from a cabinet level position to one of a myriad of agencies vying for attention and influence within the Department of Homeland Security after the September 11 attacks. Notable failures of this multi-layered approach includes the federal response to Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, which have been well-documented by disasterologists for over a decade.

Instead, I'm testifying today on the other key roles emergency management plays in everyday life, and why it is important that it be elevated to a cabinet level department outside of its role in emergency response coordination.

Aside from response, emergency management is responsible for the mitigation of, planning and preparing for, and recovering from disasters of all shapes and sizes. Mitigation limits risk to life and property; planning and preparedness makes sure everyone knows their role if response is required; recovery ensures that we find the gaps and build back better, whether from a policy or physical perspective. Each of those areas are **critical** to the health and safety of Marylanders, and without a department-level organization vested with the authority, roles, and responsibilities to coordinate other departments to set strategy and achieve goals, we will not be ready for what the future brings.

As one of the youngest local emergency managers in Maryland, I am requesting this Committee not only consider what is needed today; I ask you to consider what will be necessary to set Maryland up for long-term success in the face of unprecedented threats and hazards. Climate change will bring more extreme weather more frequently, whether it be stronger, more frequent hurricanes or longer, more prolonged

drought. It will also bring rising seas, threatening core areas of Maryland life like downtown Annapolis, the waterman enclaves of the Eastern Shore, and the resort town of Ocean City. Globalization will continue to bring pandemics like COVID-19 to our doors indiscriminately, bringing everything from food production to transportation to schools to a grinding halt - leaving thousands in need. Cyberattacks, whether internal or foreign actors, threaten critical infrastructure and our electronic-based way of life and commerce.

Each of these threats and hazards have something in common: the way in which they will impact Marylanders will be interconnected and complex, and will require strong leadership that can carry out the Governor's direction without hindrance or levels of unnecessary bureaucratic red tape. I don't say all this to be a doomsday sayer; in fact, I'm optimistic that with the right leaders in place Maryland can be in a strong position moving into the future to face these challenges. However, I do not believe our position will be as strong if the current administrative structure is left in place. To meet the challenges of the future, we must have a 21st century department capable of breaking down the silos of our state government and coordinating both traditional and non-traditional partners to ensure the safety and prosperity of Marylanders. According to a [Pew Research Center](#) report released in 2018,

"A declaration can unlock an array of federal assistance from many departments and agencies. More than 300 federal programs across 17 departments—including Homeland Security, which houses FEMA; Defense; Housing and Urban Development; Transportation; and Agriculture—together spent an average of \$25.5 billion a year from 2005 to 2014 on disaster assistance after adjusting for inflation."

The sheer number of federal and private programs that Maryland stands to take advantage of under the right administrative organization and strategy is enough to balance any cost the establishment of a new department may require.

I understand how valuable your time is as a Legislator, so I will end with this: Marylanders deserve a department whose sole focus and purpose is to:

- Mitigate risk to their health and safety by working with various departments to incorporate mitigation strategies and available funding;
- Prepare for and plan for the next disaster to ensure all departments have the ability to carry out the roles and responsibilities required in the event of a response;
- Respond to the next disaster by communicating directly with decision makers and other Department Secretaries to bring the full capability of Maryland's response network to the aid of those who need help
- Recover from disasters by coordinating all possible relief programs and improvement planning to create a more resilient Maryland.

Sincerely,



Anna Sierra, MS

Director

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