



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Senator Paul Pinsky, Chair
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
Annapolis, MD 21041

Re: Testimony **IN SUPPORT** of SB 658: Maryland Department of Emergency Management –
Establishment and Transfer of Maryland 9-1-1 Board

Dear Chair Pinsky and Members of the Committee,

I commend Vice Chair Kagan for her consistent leadership as Chair of the Commission to Advance Next Generation 911 Across Maryland and for her introduction of Senate Bill 658.

Senate Bill 658 would implement the Commission's recommendation to rename the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) as the Maryland Department of Emergency Management and make it a cabinet-level executive department. The MEMA director would become the Secretary of the Department of Emergency Management and report directly to the Governor. The bill would also transfer Maryland's 9-1-1 Board, currently housed under the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, to the proposed department while maintaining its autonomy and funding authority.

Maryland's current 9-1-1 infrastructure is aging, and current technologies are changing at a pace that exceeds our own system. As part of the Commission's legislative requirement to study and recommend "the ideal role and placement for the 9-1-1 Board within State government to best service its broad and evolving mission," the Commission has recommended placing it within a cabinet-level entity. Senate Bill 658 would make Maryland only one of nine states with an agency that oversees both 911 operations and emergency management.

As a former firefighter and EMT, I have prioritized public safety as County Executive. Our Administration has already selected a vendor to provide Next Generation Core Services to Howard County. Last year, I signed Council Bill 59-2020, which designated the Howard County Department of Fire and Rescue Services as the county enforcement authority for the 9-1-1 direct dialing required under "Kari's Law." Howard County's FY21 budget also funded two new Police Department positions to fortify Next Generation 911 system operations.

First responders across the state continue to respond to service calls to keep our residents safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. They will significantly benefit from a state-level department equipped to strengthen Next Generation 911 standards. Senate Bill 658 will elevate the importance of emergency management in Maryland and strengthen support to local jurisdictions before, during, and after crises occur.

Thank you for your consideration and I urge a favorable report on SB 658.

All the Best,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive