

Submitted to the Maryland Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee for the February 17, 2021 1:00pm bill hearing

Testimony of:

Jack Markey, Acting-President, Maryland Emergency Managers Association, an affiliate organization of the Maryland Association of Counties

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Emergency Management is a function which exists to enhance the ability of the senior elected executive official of a government to effectively mobilize their community through coordinated efforts before, during, and after a wide range of crises, emergencies and disasters. At the federal, state, and the county level, officials are responsible to improve capabilities to reduce risk; warn the public and government leaders of impending emergencies; and coordinate response and recovery actions across a wide range of emergencies and disasters. In carrying out these functions, Emergency Management officials are responsible to the government executive who appoints them, but importantly are also a critical link to coordinate action between different levels of government in the same political subdivision's geography, or with other adjacent governments who may offer assistance. In Maryland this responsibility for action has both State and local organizations defined in the Public Safety Article of the Maryland Annotated Code (Md. Code Ann.). Currently the State-level organization, the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), exists within the Maryland Military Department. While this organizational alignment has served Maryland well over the years, increasing demands for integration horizontally across State government agencies and with peer States in our region; with Maryland's county emergency management agencies; and with the federal government gives rise to the need to change our approach to move Maryland forward.

An example of this evolving responsibility for integration would be the responsibility for State government continuity of government and continuity of operations plans enacted as §14-116 of the Maryland Emergency Management Agency Act based on legislative action during the 2020 Maryland General Assembly session. This activity has primary implications within the State government, but also is critically important to be linked to similar local and federal government efforts. Maryland's residents rely on all levels of government to provide coordinated action during emergencies like the COVID-19 catastrophic health emergency we are working and living through as we consider this bill. The response to COVID-19 has illustrated that improvements in coordination between government levels are necessary.

A day to day function that exhibits this same coordination of government public safety resources in response to requests from residents and visitors is the operation of public safety answering points who deliver 9-1-1 services. Delivery of 9-1-1 services in Maryland is a local government responsibility, with oversight and significant leadership from the Maryland 9-1-1 Board and funding from the MD 9-1-1 Trust Fund. In the majority, but not all of the local governments, there is a direct organizational alignment between 9-1-1 and the broader Emergency Management function. Even in the counties where these two functions do not exist within the same government organization for locally determined reasons, they still share the same fundamental alignment of responsibilities. Uniting the two organizations with both State and local leadership and coordination responsibilities for 9-1-1 and Emergency Management at the State level is a sound choice. This bill's suggested actions would strengthen Maryland's capabilities to reduce risk from, and when necessary respond to, catastrophic health events, cybersecurity risks and attacks, environmental impacts of climate change, and many other complex problems facing our communities.

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Specific to the two major actions recommended within the bill:

1. The Maryland Department of Emergency Management should be established as an independent State government agency to enhance the Governor's ability to direct action within the State government; coordinate with and between the State's local governments; and with peer States and the federal government before, during and after emergencies and disasters of all types.
2. 9-1-1 has a fundamental multi-agency communication, collaboration, and coordination role which would be enhanced by being more closely aligned with the Emergency Management functions at the State and local level. Moving the MD 9-1-1 Board's functions to the MD Department of Emergency Management, once established, would strengthen both 9-1-1 and Emergency Management coordination at the State and with the local organization for each political subdivision.

Rationale for supporting the bill:

- At the local level Emergency Management exists to support, and reports directly to the senior elected official. The local Emergency Management Director also holds a responsibility as a Governor's appointee under the Maryland Emergency management Agency Act §14-113 to coordinate with State actions under and across county and when appropriate State boundaries;
- Emergency Management and 9-1-1 are critical multi-agency coordination entities operating at the county level under Md. Code Ann., §1-304 and the Maryland Emergency Management Agency Act, §14-109 to implement intra- and inter-jurisdictional actions by public safety agencies before, during, and after emergencies and disasters
- MEMA and the MD 9-1-1 Board have both provided invaluable assistance, guidance, and leadership to their local partners in their respective missions. Their positive impact could be increased by aligning their efforts at the State level inside the State government, and continuing and increasing their alignment with local efforts outside the State government
- SB658 as proposed seeks to elevate MEMA to an independent MD Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) and, via movement of MD 9-1-1 Board to MDEM once established, to align 9-1-1's public request for emergency assistance and dispatch activities with the existing body (Emergency Management) that provides public warning and public safety planning and coordination with senior elected officials across the State
- Speaking from my own personal experience, Frederick County carried out such an alignment of multi-agency functions and have derived significant benefits and efficiencies by doing so. This has resulted in better coordinated responses to serve those in distress, regardless of the jurisdiction of the agencies providing the services. The continuity of interagency and inter-jurisdictional effort before, during, and after emergencies and disasters is a worthy benefit for any challenges that may occur during the transition necessary to implement this bill.

I urge your support for Senate Bill 658 as written.