



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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HB 509 – 9-1-1 Specialists – Classification as First Responders House Health and Government Operations Committee February 17, 2021

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 509 – 9-1-1 Specialists – Classification as First Responders. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

9-1-1 Specialists are not currently classified as First Responders, and, therefore, do not enjoy those same levels of protections. These workers deal with unimaginable stress as they receive frantic calls from Marylanders who are facing loss of life, limb, and loved ones. Some workers suffer from PTSD, having to hear the pained voices of people experiencing the worst situations in their lives. They do this job, day-in and day-out, keeping all of us safe.

First Responder status provides special privileges for those who bear the burden and honor of protecting us. From increased penalties for those who assault them, to notification of possible exposure to infectious diseases, First Responders are given workplace protections commensurate with their role in our society.

By definition, Maryland's 9-1-1 Specialists are the very first people to respond in a crisis. They receive the calls from very distressed residents, looking for immediate help in dangerous situations. They move quickly to see that the appropriate help is dispatched, immediately. Our 9-1-1 Specialists put the "First" in First Responder, and we need to treat them as such.

We urge a favorable report on HB 509.