



# **City Union of Baltimore**

**Local 800, AFT, AFL-CIO**

**President**

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**Written Testimony from the City Union of Baltimore  
AFT Local 800**

**Submitted by Antoinette Ryan-Johnson, President  
HB 509 - 911 Specialists – Classification as First Responders  
Before the House Health and Government Operations Committee  
February 17, 2021**

## **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

Good afternoon Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Peña-Melnyk, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. My name is Antoinette Ryan-Johnson, and I am the President of the City Union of Baltimore, AFT Local 800 the union for employees working for the City of Baltimore and the Baltimore City Public School System. Our union is the certified bargaining agent for approximately 3,000 municipal employees, including approximately two-hundred 911 and Police Dispatch employees who currently work to answer 911 calls and dispatch to police officers within the city of Baltimore. On behalf of those workers, we ask for a favorable report for HB 509.

Madam chair, the city employees who are on the other line when a resident calls 9-1-1 have been providing vital, heroic services to our communities despite the impact of COVID-19. While many businesses have temporarily closed, our members working for 911 and emergency dispatchers have continued to be the true first responders, often being the very first people a resident reaches out to when a life-threatening emergency arrives and being the lifeline to our law enforcement officers. And yet, for some reason, they have not been considered first responders. The passage of this bill corrects that error.

Members of the committee, I cannot understate how important our first-responders are to our community and officers at normal times, and especially so in a time when merely leaving one's residence is a threat to one's life under a global pandemic. COVID-19 has certainly taken a toll on our residents, but without the work of first responders, I shudder to think of how worse our situation under COVID would have become. It's a plain truth that without someone on the other line to be able to assess the problem a resident is having and connect them to the proper emergency services, the lives of thousands of Marylanders would be lost. It is illogical that these specialists are excluded from being classified as first responders, and so we call for a favorable report for HB 509. Thank you.

*"Strength in Unity"*

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