



## The Maryland House of Delegates

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

### Health and Government Operations

#### HB989 Public Safety – 9-1-1 Emergency Telephone System – Alterations

March 10, 2021

For the past three years I have been a member of the *Commission to Advance Next Generation 9-1-1 Across Maryland* (NG9-1-1). The Commission has released three annual reports in [2018](#), [2019](#), and [2020](#) that have been incorporated into nine laws with bi-partisan efforts and support. As a result of our efforts, Maryland is a national leader as we transition to NG911. Our 9-1-1 system is one of the most important (and reliable) services our local governments provide.

#### WHAT DOES THIS BILL DO and WHY DO WE NEED IT?

HB989 implements the key recommendations from the Commission's [third annual report](#). This legislation would address the following provisions:

##### **Modify the 9-1-1 Board Membership**

There have been very few changes in the composition in membership since the *Emergency Number Systems Board* (ENSB) was created in 1979. Modifying membership would reflect the anticipated expertise needed to implement NG911 such as persons with cyber security, finance, and accessibility expertise. Please see the attached table for the changes to the 9-1-1 Board. These new members will provide needed expertise as the Board implements NG911 technology and faces new challenges.

##### **Require Psychological Training for 9-1-1 Specialists**

The emotional labor of being a 9-1-1 Specialist takes a toll, especially now that they will be responding to texts and live video of events. Our "First First Responders" experience suicidal thoughts at a rate more than double the general public. Nearly a quarter suffer from work-related depression or probable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This bill would require psychological training for 9-1-1 Specialists. Providing our current and future 9-1-1 Specialists with the tools to handle traumatic events will help reduce burnout, turnover, and long-term onboarding costs.

##### **Study Workers' Compensation for 9-1-1 Specialists**

This bill would authorize a study that would seek to determine whether Workers' Compensation laws should be amended to include visual and audible traumatic events as a compensable injury for 9-1-1 Specialists. Now that "text-to-9-1-1" is available statewide, the effects of trauma will only worsen as Maryland Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) accept images and videos.

### **Provide Funding for Recruitment**

Recruitment is costly for our PSAPs, which already struggle with insufficient funds. The [NG911 Commission's 2018 Report](#) identified a 13% vacancy rate of 9-1-1 specialists in Maryland. While the General Assembly has enacted legislation to provide greater benefits for these positions (such as authorizing counties to offer a \$2,500 tax credit in 2018), it is important that Marylanders know about these public safety career opportunities. The 9-1-1 Board should be authorized to fund these needed services to ensure that our PSAPs are fully staffed.

### **Mandate 9-1-1 Outage Notification**

Approximately 74% of the nearly five million 9-1-1 calls made in Maryland annually are from wireless devices. A 9-1-1 outage on a wireless carrier's network could cost lives. Our 24 9-1-1 Centers, the 9-1-1 Board, and the public need to know when 9-1-1 is unavailable. In the event of a 9-1-1 outage **lasting more than 30 minutes**, the carrier should inform the affected 9-1-1 Centers and the Maryland Joint Operations Center (MJOC) within the Maryland Emergency Management Agency. The carrier must also notify the 9-1-1 Board before its next meeting. While collaborating with stakeholders, we requested an amendment to make the outage requirement more similar to the FCC requirements by adding "and affecting greater than 600,000 user minutes." These standard practices would ensure timely notification to our emergency centers and increase the oversight on our carriers.

### **Ensure NG911 Contracts Use Standardized Geographic Data**

NG911 is being implemented on a county-by-county basis and determines which jurisdiction will answer the call. Lack of quality geographic data can cause devastating results-- [as seen in the June 2020 drowning](#) of Fitz Thomas on the border of Loudoun County, Virginia, and Montgomery County, Maryland. HB989 would ensure that county NG911 contracts require providers to use standardized geographic data. During an emergency, every second matters and precious minutes can be wasted without correct geographic data. Nobody should be passed from County to County while they are waiting for emergency assistance.

### **Enforcing Kari's Law**

The law was inspired by a tragic event when a mother, Kari Hunt, was murdered by her husband in Texas. Her nine-year old daughter tried to call 9-1-1 from the hotel room, but she did not know she needed to dial a 9 to get an outside line. Maryland was the first state in the nation to adopt [Kari's Law](#) in 2015. As a result, anyone, anywhere in the state, should be able to dial 9-1-1 without a prefix. HB989 would allow individual counties to choose enforcement authority for the law. If they choose not to designate a County entity, the State Fire Marshall will have the responsibility.

**I urge a favorable with amendment report on HB989 to enhance our State's public safety system.**