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Calvert and St. Mary's Counties

Judicial Proceedings Committee



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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Senate Bill 673 – Natural Resources Police Force – Employees – Authority of Secretary

Dear Chair McIntosh and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to introduce Senate Bill 673 – Natural Resources Police Force – Employees – Authority of Secretary. This bill would allow the Natural Resources Police force (NRP) to be governed and managed similarly to how all other statewide police forces operate in Maryland.

The concept for Senate Bill 673 was requested by members of the NRP and resolves an inconsistency in State law. To my knowledge, the NRP is the last statewide law enforcement agency where the Secretary of the department is not given this authority over the management of their police force. In 2020, this Committee and the full General Assembly passed similar legislation to give the Secretary of General Services the same authority over their Department's police force. This language is similar to the provisions of law that govern the Maryland State Police.

During the drafting of this bill, I was approached by members of the Black Officers' Association (BOA) of the NRP, who raised the issue that the NRP's promotion practices were not reflective of the demographics of the State. The figures that they provided were appalling and I understand and share their frustration. I have been in communication with the BOA, as well as the State Law Enforcement Officers Labor Alliance (SLEOLA), the Fraternal Order of Police, and the Department of Natural Resources to make changes to this bill in an effort to respond to their concerns. While it was impossible to satisfy all stakeholders, many of their recommendations are reflected in the bill as it passed the Senate.

As a result of these discussions, Senate Bill 673 requires the NRP to take all necessary actions to pursue diversity within its sworn and civilian ranks so that it reflects the demographics of the State to the extent practical. The bill also includes a requirement for NRP to develop an action plan to diversify its workforce. These provisions are modeled after language from the 2021 Joint Chairmen's Report requiring the State Police to take similar action. It is my belief that, when taken as a whole, Senate Bill 673 holds the Secretary and the Superintendent accountable for resolving these issues while giving the Department the flexibility it needs to implement such a plan.

Having served for 30 years as a member of the NRP, I know how important this agency is to our State and how critical it is that we address these issues as quickly as possible. This bill passed the Senate unanimously. I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 673. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Bailey".

Senator Jack Bailey