

PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS OF MARYLAND



February 16, 2022

Senator William C Smith, Jr., Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Testimony Concerning SB446, an Act concerning – Public Safety – Fire, Rescue or Emergency Services Entities – Peer Support

Submitted to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: Favorable

On behalf of the Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland, we submit this testimony in support of Maryland Senate Bill 446, introduced by Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, an Act concerning – Public Safety – Fire, Rescue or Emergency Services Entities – Peer Support.

The Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland (PFFMD) serves as the statewide affiliate of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF). Our membership includes local affiliates of the IAFF at the federal, state and local level which, combined, represent over 12,000 active and retired fire, rescue, and emergency services personnel.

The need for mental health resources in the fire, rescue, and emergency medical profession is on the rise. Each and every day our frontline heroes are exposed to the most unimaginable of circumstances. Over time this takes a toll on the mental health of our first responders.

The International Association of Fire Fighters working in conjunction with our local IAFF affiliates successfully developed and implemented “peer support” programs around the United States, including, here in the State of Maryland. While implementing this critical program the most common issue we heard from our members was the confidentiality of the process. This legislation would ensure that any member reaching out to a peer support counselor for assistance can do so with the assurance of State law that those conversations will be kept confidential. The peace of mind that goes along when reaching out for help without the fear of reprisal from an employer or the stigma of seeking mental health services is immeasurable.

Thank you for your attention to this critical piece of legislation and the positive impact it will have on the mental health services to our fire fighters and emergency medical services members across the State of Maryland. We strongly support Senate Bill 446 and urge the committee to give this important legislation a favorable report.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Buddle, President
Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland

The membership of the Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland includes 25 local IAFF affiliates from the following jurisdictions:

Federal: Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Fort George G. Meade, National Capital Federal Fire Fighters.

State: Baltimore / Washington International Airport, Martin State Airport.

Local: Annapolis, Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City (2 affiliates), Baltimore County, Carroll County, Cecil County, Charles County, Cumberland, Frederick County, Garrett County, Hagerstown, Howard County, Montgomery County, Ocean City, Prince Georges County, Queen Annes County, Salisbury, Talbot County, Worcester County.