



House Bill 437

Criminal Law – Public Safety – Communications With Public Safety Answering Points

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judiciary Committee

Date: February 8, 2022

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 437. This bill would strengthen state laws to protect 9-1-1 centers from malicious threats that disrupt emergency communications and jeopardize public safety.

In 2019, the General Assembly passed Carl Henn’s Law, landmark legislation to update state laws and the 9-1-1 financing system to provide the flexibility and resources needed for the deployment of a statewide Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG911) system that Maryland residents expect and deserve. As Maryland accelerates its move toward NG911, proper safeguards are necessary to protect against new and evolving threats.

HB 437 generally prohibits any actions that intend to interrupt or impair the functioning of a 9-1-1 center. Additionally, the bill expressly prohibits “swatting,” where an individual places a phony 9-1-1 call, often alleging a hostage situation or other serious circumstances, with the intention of dispatching law enforcement personnel to an address where no emergency exists. By weaponizing 9-1-1, swatting places first responders and civilians in danger, and drains limited public safety resources.

The bill prohibits a person from knowingly making a statement, report, or complaint to a 9-1-1 center. A violator is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to the existing penalty of imprisonment for up to six months and/or a fine up to \$500. The bill also prohibits a person from committing a prohibited act that results in law enforcement personnel being dispatched to respond to the statement, report, or complaint. A violator is guilty of a felony and subject to imprisonment for up to three years and/or a \$5,000 maximum fine. Finally, under the bill, an act of swatting that results in serious bodily injury to any person is a felony and subject to imprisonment for up to five years and/or a \$25,000 maximum fine.

By strengthening state laws to protect 9-1-1 centers from malicious attacks and dangerous swatting incidents, HB 437 would enhance public safety in Maryland and in our local communities. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 437.