



Senate Bill 881

Task Force to Study the Practice Known as "Swatting"

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judiciary Committee

Date: April 5, 2022

From: Kevin Kinnally and Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 881. This bill would strengthen state laws to protect first responders and residents 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.

SB 881 would expressly prohibit "swatting," where an individual places a phony 9-1-1 call, often alleging a hostage situation or other serious circumstance, with the intention of dispatching law enforcement personnel to an address where no emergency exists. By weaponizing 9-1-1 and public emergency response staff, swatting places first responders and civilians in danger, and drains limited public safety resources.

The bill prohibits a person from making a false statement to a "governmental emergency report recipient" with reckless disregard of causing bodily harm to an individual as a direct result of a response to the false statement. The bill (1) specifies criminal penalties for violations, (2) establishes a civil cause of action against a person who causes injuries as a result of a violation, (3) contains venue-related provisions, and (4) authorizes court-ordered reimbursement of individuals who incur damages because of a response to a prohibited false statement.

By strengthening state laws to protect 9-1-1 centers, first responders, and residents from dangerous swatting incidents, SB 881 would enhance public safety in Maryland and in our local communities. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 881.