



House Bill 788

Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Appropriations Committee

Date: March 16, 2023

From: Dominic J. Butchko and Jeremy Engel

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 788. This bill represents the work product of a broad coalition of stakeholders in the firefighting service. The outlook for firefighting in Maryland is bleak. Retirements are quickly outpacing recruitment and retention, causing a shortfall in personnel and an overuse of those still willing and able to serve. Many communities have even had to call on volunteers who are well into ages 60 and 70 years old for primary response to fire calls. Maryland's leaders must act soon to support this critical public service before it becomes an issue of public safety.

HB 788 is one of MACo's legislative initiatives for the 2023 legislative session, distinguishing this issue as an extremely high priority for all 23 counties and Baltimore City.

Marylanders benefit from a broad network of firefighting services capable of responding to a wide range of emergencies. For several decades now, recruitment and retention have been on the decline. Once a key part of the connective tissue bringing together communities, working as a career and/or volunteer firefighter has lost its appeal. While Maryland's fire service is capable of meeting today's demand, the future looks troubling. Support for these essential first-responders is more important than ever.

HB 788 can take a strong step in the right direction and support our firefighting services by analyzing ways to support modern recruitment and retention efforts.

HB 788 establishes the blue-ribbon Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland and will be tasked with examining two primary areas:

- **The effectiveness and viability of uniform incentives, offerings, or practices employed in other states to attract, support, and retain individuals in firefighting roles; and**
- **The suitability of comparable or similar incentives, offerings, and practices as compared to the landscape of the state.**

The work that will be advanced by this commission is critical for the health and public safety of Maryland. By bringing together all stakeholders, it will be possible to craft a broad menu of policy options and recommendations at both the state and local level to help bolster firefighting in Maryland. Accordingly, MACo requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 788.