

Chief Louis Winston - HB 788 Strengthen Fire Fight

Uploaded by: Calvin Ball

Position: FAV



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

2201 Warwick Way, Marriottsville, MD 21104
410-313-6000

LOUIS G. WINSTON, FIRE CHIEF • CALVIN BALL, COUNTY EXECUTIVE

March 16, 2023

Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Committee,

We are writing in support of House Bill 788 to establish a Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland.

The Fire Service, on a national level, is currently experiencing challenges in the recruitment and retention of qualified candidates for both the career and volunteer services. Many jurisdictions in this region are competing for the same limited pool of candidates to adequately fill the ranks to acceptable levels. Howard County is often conducting hiring processes for career candidates at the same time as several other jurisdictions in the region. Many applicants will drop out of our process, as they may get an offer from another jurisdiction, prior to the start of our next trainee class. As schedules, pay and benefits are commensurate across the region, applicants will accept the first position offered to them. We also see several fewer applicants in each subsequent hiring process, on a magnitude in the hundreds.

All regional jurisdictions are also attempting to hire credentialed Advanced Life Support providers (Paramedics). Many of the local university and college systems that offer Paramedic curricula have seen a marked decrease in students applying for and pursuing this career field. Likewise, volunteer recruitment and retention have become a challenge, due to many factors, to possibly include; the economy and ever-increasing training requirements to attain and maintain operational requirements of firefighting and Emergency Medical Service delivery. This is certainly true of our volunteer ranks in Howard County.

The establishment of this commission will greatly assist the fire service in Maryland in identifying the key issues in recruitment and retention and identifies the appropriate stakeholders in researching this problem. The inability to adequately recruit and retain qualified career and volunteer personnel could put the safety of our current first responders and the community in jeopardy. Our Fire Department's call volume continues to increase and staffing shortages can lead to provider burnout and a declination in job satisfaction.

We urge a favorable report in support of House Bill 788, to ensure fire service recruitment and retention issues in the State of Maryland can be identified and addressed accordingly. This will lead to a safer work environment for our career and volunteer personnel, and result in a more efficient and effective response structure for the citizens and visitors to Howard County.

HB0788-APP_MACo_SUP.pdf

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: FAV



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.

HB0788-APP_MACo_SUP.pdf

Uploaded by: Jeremy Engel

Position: FAV



House Bill 788

Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland

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Written testimony HB0788.pdf

Uploaded by: Joel McCrea

Position: FAV

MARYLAND STATE FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Representing the Volunteer Fire, Rescue and Emergency Medical Services Personnel



Joel C. McCrea

President 2021 - 2022
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Appropriations Committee
Delegate Ben Barnes; Chair
Delegate Mark S. Chang; Vice Chair
Room 212
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

March 16, 2023

Greetings from the Maryland State Firemen's Association ("MSFA"). As a Past President and current member of the MSFA Legislative Committee, I am pleased to offer my testimony in support of House Bill 788 (Senate Bill 0414). When the MSFA was approached by a representative from the Maryland Association of Counties last fall, we were eager to hear what initiatives would be brought forward. When SB 414 was introduced, the MSFA quickly responded with its support.

As we look at the current crisis of recruiting and retaining volunteer fire service members, we look at three main categories that affect our effectiveness of drawing in new members and keeping the ones that we have; culture, commitment, and cost.

While we have seen tremendous strides in repairing fire house culture, many departments continue to operate and lose members due to antiquated ways of thinking and not embracing much needed shifts in the way we include others. The cultural divide among the older and younger members is a wall that is becoming more difficult to climb and bridging the age gap has become an obstacle that many departments do not know how to overcome.

Although you will find committed individuals in every corner of the state, the difficulty in balancing careers, families and volunteering has made it less attractive to the younger generations. Training hours required for volunteers to ride on apparatus has increased twenty-fold over the past 30 years. Volunteer burnout occurs when membership numbers dwindle, and the weight of responsibility falls on the few. It becomes almost impossible for the members that remain to continue to provide the necessary services. We all know how small changes can create a domino effect, both good and bad. There are departments facing closure due to lack of embracing a change in culture. The critical dialogue needs to happen now.

Recruitment and retention issues are not specific to Maryland. In recent years, our neighboring states of Pennsylvania, with their 2018 release of SR-6, and Ohio, with the more recent January 5th release of the Ohio Governor's Task Force of the Volunteer Fire Services Report & Recommendations, share common challenges and goals. Maryland echoes the statement put out in the Ohio Taskforce report that "volunteer fire departments should be adequately funded, properly resourced with equipment that meets the needs of the community and is housed in fire stations that are safe and built to current building standards. Sufficient personnel should be ready to respond to emergencies within a reasonable time."

With the ever-increasing cost of apparatus and costs to maintain and operate facilities, volunteer fire departments are now faced with astronomical fiscal impacts that their local fundraising efforts just cannot cover. Federal and local grants are helpful, but with more and more departments applying, there is less opportunity to obtain meaningful assistance. The MSFA can offer some financial relief with the help of its Volunteer Company Assistance Fund ("VCAF"), but with available VCAF funds at an all-time low and solid way to replenish this fund, the assistance that can be provided with VCAF is just not enough.

The Maryland State Firemen's Association looks forward to being represented on this Commission and partnering with other state organizations to ensure the invaluable services that our volunteer fire service personnel provide the citizens of Maryland continue and are supported through the years to come. We respectfully ask for a favorable vote on HB 788.

"Things are changing quickly and if we don't adapt ourselves to these changes, we are going to be the ones who have failed the citizens that joined the fire service to serve."

-Daniel "Skip" Mahan

Respectfully submitted,

Joel C. McCrea

Joel C. McCrea

MSFA President 2021-2022

HB0788.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Jonathan Dayton

Position: FAV



Allegany Garrett Counties Volunteer Fire Rescue Association
P.O. Box 935 Frostburg, MD 21532
agcvfra.net

Appropriations Committee
Chair Delegate Ben Barnes
March 14, 2023

Dear Committee,

The Allegany Garrett Counties Volunteer Fire Rescue Association is writing you today in full **support** of HB0788: Establishing the Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland to study and make recommendations regarding the effectiveness and viability of certain incentives, offerings, or practices employed in other states to attract, support, and retain individuals in fire fighting roles; and requiring the Commission to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 1, 2023.

Fire and EMS departments across Western Maryland and the nation are the lifeline and safety net of their communities providing life-saving emergency services. Like many other counties and states across the country, we have seen sharp volunteerism declines over the past several years. This decline raises many alarms for the sustainability of volunteer emergency services moving forward. Volunteers save taxpayers millions of dollars annually, and collectively, as a state, we should be looking into recruiting and retaining more volunteers to continue those savings.

As this proposed legislation continues through the committee, we offer our full support and will provide additional testimony if the occasion arises.

Sincerely,

Austin Christner, President

Jonathan Dayton, MS, NREMT, CNE, Vice President, Public Information Officer, and Legislative Committee Chairperson

The mission of the Allegany and Garrett Counties Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association is to serve, promote, advocate and represent the interests of the volunteer fire, rescue, and emergency medical services in Allegany and Garrett Counties.

BaltimoreCounty_FAV_HB0788.pdf

Uploaded by: Joshua Greenberg

Position: FAV



JOHN A. OLSZEWSKI, JR.
County Executive

JENNIFER AIOSA
Director of Government Affairs

AMANDA KONTZ CARR
Legislative Officer

JOSHUA M. GREENBERG
Associate Director of Government Affairs

BILL NO.: **HB 788**

TITLE: Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland

SPONSOR: Delegate Rosenberg

COMMITTEE: Appropriations

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: March 16, 2023

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** HB 788 - Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland.

The Baltimore County Fire Department is considered a combination system which is defined as a Career/Volunteer response department. It is comprised of approximately 1000 career members as well as 1000 active response volunteers and another 1000 support system volunteers. In all, these individuals are stationed within 54 emergency response stations – 25 career stations and 29 volunteer stations.

As one of the largest combination emergency response systems in the state of Maryland that provides Fire, Rescue and Emergency Medical Services, the Department is experiencing significant challenges relating to recruitment and retention, both within career and volunteer divisions. This is not unique to Baltimore County as other emergency response departments nationwide are experiencing similar recruitment and retention challenges. The creation of a commission to study practices employed in other states to attract, support, and retain individuals will greatly enhance Maryland’s ability to create a sustainability plan for the future.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 788. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, Director of Government Affairs at jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov.

_Anne Arundel County_FAV_HB 788.pdf

Uploaded by: Peter Baron

Position: FAV



March 16, 2023

House Bill 788

Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland

House Appropriations Committee

Anne Arundel County **SUPPORTS** House Bill 788 – Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland. This Bill would establish the Commission to study and make recommendations regarding various strategies and options to attract, support, and retain individuals in fire fighting roles and other issues to enhance and support career and volunteer fire fighting in the State.

Anne Arundel County values both our career and volunteer fire and rescue services, whom we rely upon for emergency response. Fiscal and staffing pressures have led to challenges recruiting and retaining members for volunteer organizations, and put response times and staffing levels at risk in the career department. An analysis of recruitment tactics, retention benefits, and long-range planning statewide to study and recommend best practices will benefit not only Anne Arundel County, but career and volunteer departments statewide to ensure that we can all meet the public safety needs of our residents.

For all of these reasons, Anne Arundel County respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** report on House Bill 788.

Testimony HB 788_Rosenberg_Appropriations.pdf

Uploaded by: Samuel Rosenberg

Position: FAV

SAMUEL I. "SANDY" ROSENBERG
Legislative District 41
Baltimore City

Health and Government Operations
Committee

Chair

Health Occupations and
Long-Term Care Subcommittee

House Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review



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ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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Testimony of Delegate Samuel I. Rosenberg

Before the House Appropriations Committee

in Support of House Bill 788

Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland

Mister Chairman and Members of the Committee:

An adequate and responsive firefighting service is critical to the functioning of any society. When we call 911, we have a basic expectation of speed and quality of service. While today, Maryland's firefighting service is able to meet demand – the current state of recruitment and retention points to a troubling future. This is an issue not only felt in Maryland but also nationally.

For several years now, both the career and volunteer firefighting services have seen the number of retirements far outpace the number of new applicants. This represents a dramatic change from a traditional norm of well-staffed firehouses.

Historically firefighting has been a core pillar of many communities. Firehouses formed part of the connective tissue that brought many towns and cities together. Being accepted into the fire service was once highly competitive and a rite of passage, but today the service is struggling to bring in new blood.

The situation has become so dire that in some communities, volunteers in their 60's and 70's are being asked to respond to calls. While no one doubts the commitment of these brave individuals, this situation is not sustainable.

Because firefighters and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel work hand in hand, House Bill 788 has been amended to expand the scope of the proposed commission to address both workforces, which face comparable challenges.

HB 788 is a critical piece of legislation that seeks to address the current negative state of firefighting and EMS recruitment and retention. By bringing together all stakeholders, our hope

is that we can craft a broad menu of policy options and recommendations at both the state and local level to help bolster these critical services.

HB 788 is the product of a broad coalition from across the emergency services. Representatives for career, volunteer, management, workforce, urban, suburban, rural – from every corner of the state – recognize that we must begin to take action today if we are to avoid a catastrophe in the future.

I urge the committee to give HB 788 a favorable report.

March 16, 2023

HB 788 Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire F

Uploaded by: Theodore Delbridge

Position: FAV



State of Maryland

Maryland Institute *for* Emergency Medical Services Systems

Wes Moore
Governor

Clay B. Stamp
Chairman, EMS Board

Theodore R. Delbridge, MD, MPH
Executive Director

HB 788 Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting within Maryland

MIEMSS Position: Support

Bill Summary: HB 788 establishes a Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting within Maryland to study and make recommendations for recruiting and retaining fire fighters in Maryland. The Commission's findings and recommendations are to be submitted on or before December 1, 2023.

Rationale:

- Fire fighters are an integral part of Maryland's emergency medical services (EMS) system. They are routinely dispatched on calls for EMS services and as first responders, provide early treatment and stabilization until more advanced care arrives.
- Additionally, fire fighters are dispatched to the scene of motor vehicle collisions to secure a safe scene for EMS clinicians, the victims, and the public and assist with extrication of victims, etc.
- There are numerous jurisdictions across the state that have cross-trained personnel that respond to EMS calls. EMS is closely connected with the fire service in Maryland, both volunteer and career.
- Fire fighters and EMS Clinicians work together as partners. Effective recruitment and retention of fire fighters impacts Maryland's overall EMS system.
- The Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting in Maryland will create a forum to identify ways to attract, support and retain fire fighters in Maryland.

MIEMSS Supports HB 788 and requests a Favorable Report.

Testimony for HB0788 031423.pdf

Uploaded by: Tom Coe

Position: FAV



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

DIVISION OF FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES

Office of the Chief

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive

Thomas E. Coe, Chief

HB0788 – Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting within Maryland

DATE: March 14, 2023
COMMITTEE: Appropriations
POSITION: **SUPPORT**
FROM: Thomas E. Coe, Chief, Division of Fire and Rescue Services,
Frederick County Government

Thank you for your consideration of HB0788 – Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting within Maryland. As the Chief of the Frederick County Division of Fire and Rescue Services, I urge the committee to give HB0788 a FAVORABLE report.

HB0788 draws attention to what has been a growing national issue over the last 40 years in the fire service, a severe decline in the number of citizens applying to join both the career and volunteer fire service ranks. This bill establishes a Commission to “to study and make recommendations regarding the effectiveness and viability of certain incentives, offerings, or practices employed in other states to attract, support, and retain individuals in firefighting roles.”

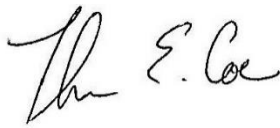
In Frederick County alone, the number of operational volunteers in our jurisdiction has declined from over 1,000 in the year 2000 to less than 500 in 2023. Many of those who remain actively engaged are greater than 60 years of age. There are many factors that are driving this decline and they are not issues specific to Maryland but we are best positioned as a State to examine the issues and make recommendations to change our current course.

The decrease in the number of volunteer responders drives an increase in the need for more career firefighters. A segment of our population where we have also noted a decline in applicants. Five years ago, a recruitment drive for career firefighters would have yielded over 1,200 applications. Last year a recruitment drive in Frederick County netted a mere 450 applicants, a 62% decrease. Also of note, those 450 applications are coming from applicants from further across the country than in years past.

The Fire Service is suffering a recruitment and retention crisis. If this crisis continues without corrective action, staffing levels and response times will suffer. That means that our citizens may not receive the critical services they request at the time of the most dire need. I look forward to this Commission and their study producing recommendations of best practices and the establishment of programs that will not only attract more personnel to the fire service but to incentivize incumbent public safety providers to remain active.

Thank you for your consideration of House Bill 0788. On behalf of Frederick County Government, I strongly urge a FAVORABLE report.

Submitted By:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Th. E. Coe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "Th" and a distinct "E. Coe" following.

Chief Thomas E. Coe
Frederick County Division of Fire and Rescue Services
Phone: (301)-600-1780
E-Mail: TCoe@frederickcountymd.gov

HB 788 - FWA- MML.pdf

Uploaded by: Angelica Bailey Thupari

Position: FWA



Maryland Municipal League

The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

March 16, 2023

Committee: House Appropriations

Bill: HB 788 – Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland

Position: Support with Amendments

Reason for Position:

MML strongly supports HB 788, the creation of a Commission to recruit and retain career and volunteer firefighters in our State. We also greatly appreciate our meaningful inclusion on the Commission, as local governments employ/incentivize career and volunteer firefighter services for our communities. As the bill's preamble states, we all benefit from strong and efficient fire, rescue, and emergency medical service response systems at the county and local levels. This Commission is an excellent step towards ensuring firefighting services can continue.

MML has one simple amendment request: to include emergency medical service (EMS) providers in addition to firefighters. Some fire departments have firefighter-only roles, while others require being cross-trained as a firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). Municipal EMS providers are experiencing acute shortages in all EMS functions. Including EMS positions in this study would enable local governments to support our heroes and ensure the safety of our residents.

With adoption of these amendments, which have been approved in the Senate cross-file SB 414, MML would respectfully request a favorable report.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Theresa Kuhns
Angelica Bailey Thupari, Esq.
Bill Jorch
Justin Fiore

Chief Executive Officer
Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs
Director, Public Policy
Deputy Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs

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