

**SB 414 -FAV - MML.pdf**

Uploaded by: Angelica Bailey Thupari

Position: FAV



## Maryland Municipal League

*The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns*

# TESTIMONY

March 29, 2023

**Committee:** House Appropriations

**Bill:** SB 414 – Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting and Emergency Medical Services Within Maryland

**Position:** Support

**Reason for Position:**

MML strongly supports SB 414, which proposes a Commission to study the recruitment and retention of career and volunteer firefighters and emergency medical service (EMS) providers in our State.

Many municipalities employ/incentivize career and volunteer EMS and firefighter services; however, we are experiencing acute shortages in all EMS functions following the COVID-19 pandemic. As the bill's preamble states, we all benefit from strong and efficient fire, rescue, and EMS response systems at the county and local levels. This Commission is an excellent step towards ensuring these vital services can continue.

For these reasons, MML supports SB 414 and respectfully requests 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

**SB0414-APP\_MACo\_SUP.pdf**

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: FAV



## **Senate Bill 414**

### *Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting and Emergency Medical Services Within Maryland*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Appropriations Committee

Date: March 29, 2023

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 414. 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.

**SB 414 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.

**SB 414 can take a strong step in the right direction and support our firefighting services by analyzing ways to support modern recruitment and retention efforts.**

SB 414 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 SB 414.

**SB0414.pdf**

Uploaded by: Jonathan Dayton

Position: FAV



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

House Appropriations Committee  
Chair Delegate Ben Barnes  
March 27, 2023

Dear Committee,

The Allegany Garrett Counties Volunteer Fire Rescue Association is writing you today in full **support** of SB0414: 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.

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**BaltimoreCounty\_FAV\_SB0414.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.:**            **SB 414**

**TITLE:**                Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting and  
Emergency Medical Services Within Maryland

**SPONSOR:**            Senator Augustine

**COMMITTEE:**        Appropriations

**POSITION:**          **SUPPORT**

**DATE:**                March 29, 2023

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** SB 414 - Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting and Emergency Medical Services 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 SB 414. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, Director of Government Affairs at [jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov](mailto:jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov).

**Anne Arundel County\_FAV\_SB 414 (2).pdf**

Uploaded by: Peter Baron

Position: FAV



March 29, 2023

**Senate Bill 414**

**Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland**

**House Appropriations Committee**

Anne Arundel County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 414 – 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 Senate Bill 414.

**SB 414, FAV, House, Tom Coe, LS23.pdf**

Uploaded by: Victoria Venable

Position: FAV



# FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

## DIVISION OF FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES

Office of the Chief

Jessica Fitzwater  
County Executive

Thomas E. Coe, Chief

### SB0414 – Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting within Maryland

**DATE:** March 29, 2023  
**COMMITTEE:** House Appropriations Committee  
**POSITION:** **SUPPORT**  
**FROM:** Thomas E. Coe, Chief, Division of Fire and Rescue Services, Frederick County Government

Thank you for your consideration of SB0414 – 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 SB 0414 a FAVORABLE report.

SB0414 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 “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 60 years or more 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 the outcome of the Commission, particularly recommendations of best practices and the establishment of programs that will not only attract more personnel to the fire service but also incentivize incumbent public safety providers to remain active.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 0414. On behalf of Frederick County Government, I strongly urge a FAVORABLE report.

Submitted By:

Chief Thomas E. Coe, Frederick County Division of Fire and Rescue Services

Phone: (301)-600-1780

E-Mail: TCoe@frederickcountymd.gov