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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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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