



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

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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.