

MARYLAND STATE FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Representing the Volunteer Fire, Rescue and Emergency Medical Services Personnel



Joel C. McCrea

President 2021 - 2022
2130 Priest Bridge Drive
Suite 4

Crofton, MD 21114

(O) 443-302-2911

(C) 410-592-7759

Email: JMcCrea@msfa.org

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 replenishment 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