



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: February 21, 2023
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy & Environment
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:

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