



**COUNCILMEMBER LAURIE-ANNE SAYLES**

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**AT LARGE**

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

March 6, 2024

TO: Delegate Ben Barnes  
Chair, Appropriations Committee

FROM: Laurie-Anne Sayles  
Montgomery County Councilmember At-Large

RE: Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention –  
Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance

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I am writing today to support [HB899](#), *Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance*. Adopting this legislation would be a significant step towards filling the growing vacant first responder positions and retaining our current first responders. We must embrace legislative solutions like HB 899 to ensure that all Marylanders have access to the public safety resources they need in a timely manner.

This bill is the work product of the Commission to Advance & Strengthen Firefighting & EMS Within Maryland (the Commission), which comprised nearly all stakeholders within Maryland's firefighter ecosystem, including the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo), the Maryland Municipal League (MML), the Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA), the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), the Maryland Professional Fire Fighters Association (PFFM), the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI), the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS), the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association, and the Maryland Fire Chiefs Association. The Commission's final report provided several recommendations to fortify Maryland's emergency response capacity, some of which are included as stipulations of this bill.

Those stipulations include:

- We are expanding the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program to cover 100% of the cost of tuition and mandatory fees at in-state community colleges and for undergraduate education and 50% of tuition and mandatory fees for graduate education for our first responders.



- Creating the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Firefighters and EMS Providers will award student loan assistance to firefighters and EMS personnel based on years of service, rank, and other criteria.
- Exploring additional recommendations from the Commission regarding childcare and healthcare lowers barriers to first responder recruitment and retention.

Maryland's average 9-1-1 response times are already above the national average. Without action by the General Assembly, many Marylanders may soon be unable to receive emergency services on time. HB 899 is a vital first step in increasing the capacity of Maryland's firefighter and emergency services workforce, which, in turn, will keep our communities safe. I strongly support this bill and urge the Committee to give HB 899 a favorable vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laurie-Anne Sayles".

Laurie-Anne Sayles,  
Montgomery County Councilmember At-Large