

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive



Brad W. Young
County Council President

FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

HB 899 – Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance

DATE: March 6, 2024
COMMITTEE: House Appropriations Committee
POSITION: Support

As the County Executive and County Council President of Frederick County, we urge the committee to give HB 899 a FAVORABLE report.

This bill is the work product of the Commission to Advance & Strengthen Firefighting & EMS (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 data on the current state of Maryland firefighter and EMS personnel recruitment and retention, as well as several recommendations to fortify Maryland's emergency response capacity.

Public safety, including fire service and emergency medical service, is a core function of local government. As communities grow and change, the demand on our public safety services evolves, and yet, recruitment and retention of firefighters and EMS staff is an ongoing challenge. For many communities in Maryland, the average 9-1-1 response times are above the national average. If current recruitment and retention trends continue, very soon many Marylanders may not receive the timely response to a 9-1-1 call that they rightfully expect. Aggressive recruitment and retention efforts for Maryland's firefighter and EMS workforce are needed to ensure these essential functions are fully staffed.

HB 899 assists with firefighter and EMS recruitment and retention by strengthening the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program, creating the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Firefighters and EMS providers. This bill also explores additional recommendations from the Commission related to childcare and healthcare.

HB 899 is the first step in increasing the capacity of Maryland's firefighter and emergency services workforce, which in turn, will keep our communities safe. Frederick County strongly supports this bill and urges the Committee to give HB 899 a FAVORABLE report.

Sincerely,

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive

Brad W. Young
County Council President