

**DANA JONES**  
*Legislative District 30A*  
Anne Arundel County

Appropriations Committee

*Subcommittees*

Vice Chair, Health and Social Services

Oversight Committee on Pensions

Joint Committee on Administrative,  
Executive, and Legislative Review

Vice Chair, Anne Arundel  
County Delegation



The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 161  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3211 · 301-858-3211  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3211  
Dana.Jones@house.state.md.us

**THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Delegate Dana Jones  
Before the Appropriations Committee**

**In Support of HB 899  
Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan  
Repayment Assistance  
March 6th 2024, 1:00 pm**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and my friends on the Appropriations Committee,

I come before you today to introduce House Bill 899 - Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance, which seeks to address the pressing needs of our firefighting and emergency medical services (EMS) in Maryland. This bill is the culmination of the dedicated efforts of the Commission to Advance & Strengthen Firefighting & EMS Within Maryland, a collaborative initiative that engaged key stakeholders, including MACo, MML, MSFA, IAFF/PFFM, MFRI, MIEMSS, Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association, and the Maryland Fire Chiefs Association. The Commission's exhaustive report not only sheds light on the current state of Maryland's firefighter and EMS personnel recruitment and retention but also presents crucial recommendations to fortify our state's emergency response capacity.

It is essential to emphasize that, despite Maryland's average 911 response times exceeding the national average, there is a growing concern in numerous communities where timely responses are not the norm. The persistence of current recruitment and retention trends could soon lead many Marylanders to experience the distressing reality of calling 911 without receiving the prompt response they rightfully expect.

To begin to reverse these trends, House Bill 899 aims to strengthen the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program. This includes expanding the program to cover 100% of the cost of tuition and mandatory fees for in-state community colleges and undergraduate education, with 50% coverage for graduate education. The program's scope will also be broadened to encompass a range of programs aligning with the evolving needs of modern emergency response networks. Additionally, funding clarification stipulates that it should be utilized after all other grants, scholarships, and financial aid (excluding student loans) are awarded, and a first-come, first-serve basis for funding allocation will be implemented.

The legislation proposes the creation of the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Firefighters and EMS Providers. This innovative program mirrors the successful model for police officers, awarding student loan assistance to firefighters and EMS personnel based on years of service, rank, and criteria established by MHEC.

This legislation also explores additional recommendations related to childcare and healthcare—a critical barrier to recruitment and retention. The legislation requests the Department of Budget & Management to evaluate the feasibility of extending health insurance coverage to qualified firefighters without comparable coverage through their employment. This could include a fully employee-paid option without direct cost effects on State premiums. Additionally, a cost-share program for limited childcare coverage to career and volunteer firefighters is proposed, with costs shared equally between counties and the state.

Finally, I am introducing this bill alongside a package of amendments that do the following:

- Corrects a drafting error related to intent, specifically aiming to enhance clarity regarding scholarship coverage for both undergraduate and graduate students. This amendment ensures that the language accurately reflects the intended scope of the scholarship program, aligning it more precisely with the goals outlined in the legislation.
- Clarifies that the first \$400,000 allotted to the Charles W. Riley program shall be prioritized for certain emergency responder specific degrees. This was requested by the Maryland Fire-Rescue Education and Training Commission (MFRETC).
- Corrects drafting error related to intent for the Charles W. Riley program. This amendment ensures precision in outlining the permissible timeframes during which scholarship recipients at various educational stages may hold the award, promoting consistency and transparency in the application of scholarship benefits.

House Bill HB 899 takes vital steps towards fortifying Maryland's emergency response capabilities. For the safety and well-being of our communities, I humbly request a favorable report on House Bill 899.

Sincerely,



Delegate Dana Jones