



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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March 6, 2024

Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY OF SUPPORT**: HB 899: Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS
Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I commend Delegate Jones for sponsoring House Bill 899 and the Maryland Association of Counties for championing this effort. This legislation is just one of several important recommendations from the Commission to Advance & Strengthen Firefighting & EMS Within Maryland. This bill will establish the Maryland Loan Repayment Assistance Program for Firefighters and Emergency Medical Services Providers, while expanding the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship.

Firefighters and Emergency Medical Service responders are selfless community leaders who willingly run towards danger while everyone else runs away. During the pandemic, the 900-strong Howard County Department of Fire & Rescue Services (HCDFRS) team were on the frontlines transporting almost 6,000 patients to our hospital over the last three years. In times of crisis, when every second matters, our response times have stayed at or below seven minutes throughout my time as County Executive.

Over the last five years, Howard County has added 123 sworn fire and rescue services personnel, more than double of the previous Administration. Just last week, we graduated 35 new members from our Trainee Class 37, bringing our total authorized positions to 584.

As Howard County Executive, a former educator, and a former firefighter, I understand firsthand the power education provides in critical pathways to advancement. I also understand the burden of student loans and how they can hinder economic mobility. The establishment of this loan assistance program and expansion of this scholarship will help with the recruitment and retention of our dedicated community heroes. In addition to addressing immediate staffing needs, House Bill 899 lays the foundation for building a resilient and sustainable fire and emergency services workforce for years to come. By investing in the education, training, and support of our first responders, we ensure that our communities are equipped to face any challenge or crisis that may arise.



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House Bill 899 is an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of supporting our firefighters who hold an unwavering dedication to our community. We must continue encouraging our community members to consider this rewarding vocation. I welcome your support and humbly request a favorable report on HB 899.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Calvin Ball', is positioned above the typed name.

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive