



House Bill 900

Employment Standards - Firefighters - Payment of Overtime and Payroll Information

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Appropriations Committee

Date: February 28, 2024

From: Brianna January and Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 900. This bill would remove a topic that is currently subject to local bargaining, and instead establish a statewide mandate for a uniform schedule and overtime policy for all professional firefighters statewide. **HB 900's one-size-fits-all policy would detrimentally impact local firefighting capacity and emergency services for Marylanders and would also pose an unreasonable and untenable funding mandate for county governments.**

Hours, schedule, and overtime are a longstanding subject of collective bargaining, for good reason: to address each local union's individual and unique needs and capacity. For example, Montgomery County firefighters recently negotiated two 24-hour shifts as their standard work week. By mandating uniform policies across the state, HB 900 would negate existing collective bargaining agreements to the detriment of firefighters, county governments, and Maryland residents. The bill would shift all firefighting units to a 42-hour work week, with anything over that being considered overtime. Concerningly, HB 900 would count all paid leave expended toward the mandated 42-hour work week standard.

Doing so would result in less coverage at any given time to respond to emergencies and/or the need to hire a significant number of firefighters to fill labor shortages resulting from restricting the work week to 42 hours. In Frederick County alone, this would mean hiring nearly 50 more firefighters at a time when the country is facing a crisis in hiring and retention of paid and volunteer firefighters.

Alternatively, counties would be forced to pay exorbitant overtime wages to maintain existing levels of emergency services. This would be a significant financial challenge for counties, maybe even untenable. Furthermore, similar overtime policies in public safety have not proven prudent or financially sound.

Counties are strong supporters of firefighters. In fact, one of MACo's four 2024 legislative initiatives seeks to tackle the hiring and retention of firefighters with a package of innovative incentive policies, employee benefits, and professional development. Notably, that bill (HB 899/SB 691) is based on the recommendations of an interim commission to study hiring and retention issues in firefighting, of which standardized overtime and schedule policies were not recommendations.

For these reasons, MACo **OPPOSES** HB 900 and urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report.