



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

Bill Summary: HB 899 modifies the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship to make the scholarship applicable to all courses at Maryland higher education institutions; increases the maximum award amount available; establishes a Maryland Loan Repayment Assistance Program for Firefighters and EMS personnel; and seeks to evaluate the feasibility of providing these personnel with health care and child care benefits through the State.

MIEMSS Position: Support

Rationale:

- Maryland’s firefighting and EMS services are provided by a network of more than 355 departments staffed by personnel trained to respond to, fire, rescue, and medical emergencies. Firefighting and EMS services are provided by full- time and part-time career and volunteer personnel. Career personnel who are employees are generally in more populated jurisdictions. While volunteers staff fire and EMS services throughout the State, they are heavily relied upon in rural communities.
- There is no State licensure or certification required for individuals to serve as firefighters in Maryland, although local jurisdictions may require certain qualifications. EMS Clinicians – Paramedics, Emergency Medical Technicians, Emergency Medical Responder, and Emergency Medical Dispatchers – are licensed or certified by the State Emergency Medical Services Board through the Maryland Institute for EMS Systems (MIEMSS) under the Education Article (Educ. § 13-516).
- Maryland’s firefighting and EMS services are understaffed in terms of both career and volunteer personnel, and the labor pool for these personnel is shrinking. The Commission to Advance & Strengthen Fire Fighting and Emergency Medical Services in Maryland (“Commission”) noted in their report that “...Maryland’s Fire and Emergency Medical Services are facing crucial skilled labor shortages and major disruptions in hiring...” (Ch. 655/SB 414 of the 2023 Session) (p. 6).
- The Commission identified improvements in financial support for personnel training / education and in working condition benefits as powerful tools that could be used to improve recruitment and retention of firefighters and EMS personnel.
- HB 899 will implement several Commission recommendations to improve financial support to firefighters and EMS Clinicians for education / training costs and potentially to provide health care and child care benefits to these personnel through the State of Maryland.

MIEMSS Supports HB 899 and Asks for a Favorable Report