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TESTIMONY ON HB#/0899- POSITION: FAVORABLE

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

TO: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB#/0899, Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance

This bill seeks to provide additional methods to overcome the critical shortage of first responders by assisting funding educations for individuals choosing a career as a first responder.

The shortages is becoming critical. As reported by WBAL on June 21, 2023, *Number of first responders in Baltimore City is dwindling*.¹ Their report notes in Baltimore City:

"It's the shortage of EMTs and paramedics that is very stressing to the membership. It puts a huge strain on the workload our members are working. They're working tons of extra shifts and it's just continuing to plague our membership with burnout," said union president Richard Langford.

Despite the budget crisis overall in Maryland this bill is more than just an expenditure, it is an INVESTMENT in the future of Maryland. The safety and health of Marylanders is at risk when we do not have adequate first responder staffing in any jurisdiction. Assisting persons to get as much help financially when pursuing these careers may make possible recruitment of new workers and facilitate keeping existing staff through relief from financial burdens they might have from entering the field.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#/0899.

¹ <https://www.wbaltv.com/article/baltimore-emt-paramedic-shortage-recruitment-2023/44067147>