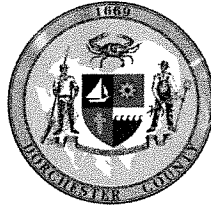


# COUNTY COUNCIL OF DORCHESTER COUNTY

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ROB KRAMER, JR.  
WILLIAM V. NICHOLS  
RICKY C. TRAVERS

February 15, 2024

The Honorable Ben Barnes, Chairman  
Appropriations Committee  
Room 121 House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Letter of Support – House Bill 899, “Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance”

Dear Chairman Barnes:

On behalf of the Dorchester County Council, I respectfully offer its support for House Bill 899, entitled “Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance” for the purpose of altering the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship to make the scholarship applicable to all courses at institutions of higher education in the State; altering the maximum award amount available, when a scholarship should be credited, and to whom initial awards should be provided under the scholarship; establishing the Maryland Loan Repayment Assistance Program for Firefighters and Emergency Medical Services Providers; providing for the administration of the loan repayment program; requiring the Department of Budget and Management to evaluate the feasibility of providing firefighters with certain health care and child care benefits; and generally relating to the recruitment and retention of firefighters and emergency medical services providers.

While Maryland’s typical 9-1-1 response times are above the national average, there are a growing number of Maryland communities where this is not the norm. If current recruitment and retention trends continue, very soon many Marylanders may not receive the timely response to a 9-1-1 call that they rightfully expect. Aggressive recruitment and retention efforts for Maryland’s firefighter and EMS workforce are needed to ensure these essential functions are fully staffed. This bill can protect Maryland communities by bolstering the firefighter and EMS workforce by: 1) strengthening the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program; 2) creating the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Firefighters and EMS Providers; and, 3) exploring additional recommendations from the Commission related to childcare and healthcare. This is the first step in increasing the capacity of Maryland’s firefighter and emergency services workforce, which in turn, will keep our communities safe. Respectfully, we ask that you look favorably upon this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this letter of support. If you have any questions, please contact the Council’s Office at (410) 228-1700.

Sincerely,

DORCHESTER COUNTY COUNCIL

George L. Pfeffer, Jr.  
President

glp/ib

cc: The Honorable Johnny Mautz, Senator  
The Honorable Christopher T. Adams, Delegate  
The Honorable Thomas S. Hutchinson, Delegate  
The Honorable Sheree Sample-Hughes, Delegate