



Maryland Municipal League
The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

February 28, 2024

Committee: House Economic Matters

Bill: HB 1145 Workers' Compensation - Occupational Disease Presumptions - Hypertension

Position: Unfavorable

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League opposes House Bill 1145, which would expand the eligibility for workers' compensation benefits for paid and volunteer firefighters experiencing hypertension.

Under current law, hypertension is a presumption for workers' compensation for volunteer and professional firefighters ("firefighters") if it causes death or disability. This is reasonable: the purpose of workers' compensation is to ensure workers who are injured at work have access to medical care and receive compensation to cover a portion of their lost wages while they are out of work. However, this bill removes "death and disability," meaning a firefighter is eligible for the benefit even if they can continue working with hypertension. This unreasonable expansion contradicts the purpose of workers' compensation benefits and would add significant expense to local governments.

Furthermore, current law provides a presumption that a hypertension diagnosis is directly related to, and caused by, the firefighter's line of work. HB 1145 would negate that presumption by merely requiring a basic physical examination to demonstrate that hypertension is present. A causal connection between the diagnosis and the work itself is no longer required, which lowers the bar to qualify for the workers' compensation benefit.

While we appreciate the sponsors' intent and value the health and safety of our paid and volunteer firefighters, the consequential expansions in this bill would result in increased and unreasonable costs to municipalities through increased workers' compensation benefits and insurance premiums. Together, and potentially in concert with other legislation being considered this year, this bill may make it more difficult for our programs to continue.

For these reasons the League respectfully requests that this committee provide House Bill 1145 with an unfavorable report.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Theresa Kuhns	Chief Executive Officer
Angelica Bailey Thupari, Esq.	Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs
Bill Jorch	Director, Public Policy & Research
Justin Fiore	Deputy Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs