



House Bill 584

*Workers' Compensation - Occupational Disease Presumptions - First Responders
(Caring for Public Employees in the Safety Professions - CAPES Act)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Economic Matters Committee

WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: February 28, 2024

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 584 WITH AMENDMENTS**. HB 584 adds colon, thyroid, and ovarian cancers to assumed presumptions for firefighters for the purposes of workers' compensation.

Counties appreciate the motivation behind HB 584, but the bill's fiscal impact gives counties pause. Workers' compensation benefits are a significant budget consideration for counties, with benefits and claims increasing year-over-year, especially for firefighters. Maryland's laws, and court decisions, have rendered the multiple presumptions effectively irrebuttable – meaning employers surely compensate for many cases that do not truly arise from workplace causes. As a rule, MACo typically opposes any legislation adding to or expanding workers' compensation presumptions for this very reason.

However, counties understand that HB 584 is a priority of the Moore-Miller Administration and the General Assembly for the 2024 legislative session. **With that consideration, counties support the intention of the bill but seek an amendment to provide State funding for the new proposed State policy it advances: payment of newly compensable benefit claims resulting from the bill.**

Maryland's counties are facing an unprecedented wave of fiscal effects. Revenues are softening – and are even in decline – as federal support recedes from the national economy. Costs of workforce, construction, and legal liability are all mounting dramatically. Additionally, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future poses costs for education that, for each county, will absorb or exceed their projected new revenues from current sources. Furthermore, county options for generating meaningful revenues are limited, with most counties already at the state's income tax rate cap, leaving the regressive property tax as the principal remaining alternative. In this precarious setting, placing new operational or fiscal burdens on county governments is untenable and unrealistic.

Providing State funding to pay for thyroid, ovarian, and colon cancer workers' compensation claims would not only help counties fund the otherwise unfunded mandate of HB 584 but would also be a significant show of the State's support of our firefighter workforce. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS HB 584** and urges a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**.