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BILL NO.: SB 691

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

SPONSOR: Senator Augustine

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

POSITION: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

DATE: February 28, 2024

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS WITH AMENDMENTS** SB 691 – Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance.

Firefighters and fire responders are critical to the safety and well-being of our communities. Last April, an eight-alarm brush fire tore through Owings Mills. Thanks to the quick work of Baltimore County’s emergency service professionals, nearly 30 homes were evacuated and the fire was contained before anyone was hurt. Baltimore County is grateful for the courage and rapid response of these professional in combatting this blaze. However, that event did more than illustrate how critical emergency services are for our community- it exhibited the need to recruit and retain professional firefighters as a critical priority for every jurisdiction.

SB 691 represents a collaborative effort between governments, stakeholders, and industry professionals to expand our support for these professionals. This includes strengthening scholarship programs to ensure these individuals can pursue their educational goals, creating a new loan repayment program for our firefighters and EMS personnel, and providing additional childcare and healthcare support to eliminate recruitment and retention barriers. Baltimore County supports the amendments proposed by the Maryland Association of Counties to ensure that the resources provided by SB 691 are equitably distributed.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report on SB 691 from the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, director of Government Affairs, at jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov.