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*Delivered electronically and by U.S. Mail
February 20, 2024*

Maryland State Senate
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Maryland House of Delegates
Appropriation Committee
Room 121 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: HB0899/SB0691 – *Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance*

To Whom It May Concern,

The Harford County Council is pleased to offer our full support for both HB0899 and SB0691 which are designed to help aid in recruitment and retention efforts for our fire and EMS first responders throughout Harford County and the State of Maryland.

HB0899 and SB0691 can protect Maryland communities by bolstering the firefighter and EMS workforce in the following ways:

- 1. Strengthens the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program**
 - a. Expands the program to cover 100% of the cost of tuition and mandatory fees at in-state community colleges and for undergraduate education, and 50% of tuition and mandatory fees for graduate education.
 - b. Clarifies that funding for the program is to be used after all other grants, scholarships, and financial aid (excluding student loans) are awarded.
 - c. Clarifies that funding is available on a first-come first-serve basis.

- 2. Creates the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Firefighters and EMS Providers**
 - a. Establishes a new program for awarding student loan assistance to firefighters and EMS personnel based on years of service, rank, and other criteria established by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC).

HB 899 and SB 691 are the first steps in increasing the capacity of Maryland's fire fighter and emergency services workforce, which in turn, will keep our communities safe.

We respectfully request that you accept this letter of support for this legislation.

Sincerely,

Patrick S. Vincenti
Council President *on behalf of the Harford County Council*
PSV:skh