

February 27, 2024

Senator Brian Feldman  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Feldman:

I am writing to communicate our position of support for Senate Bill 0691.

The Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI) at the University of Maryland, is the state's comprehensive education and training system for Maryland's EMS, Fire, and Rescue personnel. The Institute trains between 25,000 to 35,000 responders annually to help save lives, property, and the environment.

As the U.S. Fire Administration asserts, there has been a steady decline in the number of firefighters in the nation. This deficit leaves communities vulnerable and greatly increases the demands placed on first responders. Supporting the programs outlined in SB0691 will incentivize first responders and significantly impact recruitment and retention efforts.

This bill strengthens the current scholarship program to cover 100% of tuition and fees at in-state community colleges for undergraduates and 50% of tuition and fees for graduate education. It also expands the scope of courses that are eligible for coverage.

Similar to the Maryland loan assistance repayment program for police officers, the bill will create a student loan assistance repayment program for fire and EMS personnel.

Lastly, the bill will allow for the exploration of childcare and healthcare programs for first responders.

I would ask that you put the safety of Maryland citizens first and support the frontline responders who tirelessly work to that end.

Sincerely,



Michael E. Cox, Jr., MS, CFO, EFO, NRP  
Executive Director