

MARYLAND STATE FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Representing the Volunteer Fire, Rescue and Emergency Medical Services Personnel



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Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Chair Senator Brian J. Feldman
Vice Chair Senator Cheryl C. Kagan
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

SB 691/HB899 Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance

The Maryland State Firemen's Association's (MSFA) mission is to serve, support, promote, advocate, and represent the interests of the volunteer fire, rescue, and emergency medical services of Maryland.

As such, and as a participant on the Commission to Advance & Strengthen Firefighting & EMS Within Maryland, the MSFA is in favor of SB691/HB899 that would support and create programs that could boost recruitment and retention of volunteer fire and EMS personnel across the state, as long as the funding mechanisms that would be put into place to implement these initiatives do not interfere with any current or future funding that supports our state partner's programs.

Respectfully submitted,

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Background:

What does SB691/HB899 Do?

#1 – Strengthens the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program

-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.

-Expands the universe of programs which qualify for funding, reflecting the needs of our modern emergency response networks.

-Clarifies that funding for the program is to be utilized after all other grants, scholarships, and financial aid (excluding student loans) are awarded.

-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

-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 MHEC.

-This new program is modeled after the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Police Officers.

#3 – Explores additional recommendations from the Commission related to childcare and healthcare

-Second to education, the Commission also identified access to childcare and healthcare as a critical barrier to recruitment and retention. These areas present a greater level of complexity and deserve additional study to develop next steps. The bill asks the Department of Budget & Management evaluate the feasibility of:

- o a program to extend coverage through health insurance offerings for State employees to qualified fire fighters who do not receive comparable coverage through their employment in that capacity. The evaluation should consider a fully employee-paid option without direct cost effects on State premiums.

- o a program to extend limited childcare coverage to career and volunteer firefighters through a cost share program where counties and the state split all costs equally.

Sponsor Amendments

MACo has worked with stakeholders on a set of sponsor amendments which clarify the intent of the bill and streamline implementation.

Amendment #1 – Corrects a drafting error related to intent.

Amendment Language

On page 3, in lines 28-29, cut and add, “100% OF THE EQUIVALENT ANNUAL TUITION AND MANDATORY FEES OF A RESIDENT undergraduate student and 50% OF THE EQUIVALENT ANNUAL TUITION AND 29 MANDATORY FEES OF A RESIDENT GRADUATE STUDENT...”

Amendment #2 – Clarifies that the first \$400,000 allotted to the program shall be prioritized for certain emergency responder specific degrees. This was requested by the Maryland Fire-Rescue Education and Training Commission (MFRETC).

Amendment Language

On page 4, in line 11, add (e) “FOR THE FIRST \$400,000 DISTRIBUTED IN SCHOLARSHIPS EACH FISCAL YEAR, MHEC SHALL PRIORITIZE STUDENTS MAJORING IN SERVICE TECHNOLOGY, EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY, FIRE SERVICE MANAGEMENT, OR PUBLIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION.”

Amendment #3 - Corrects drafting error related to intent.

Amendment Language

On page 4, in line 13-14, strike and replace with, “(f) EACH RECIPIENT OF A SCHOLARSHIP UNDER THIS SECTION TAKING A COURSE AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE MAY HOLD THE AWARD SO LONG AS THEY MEET ALL QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP.

(g) EACH UNDERGRADUATE RECIPIENT OF A SCHOLARSHIP UNDER THIS SECTION MAY HOLD THE AWARD FOR 5 YEARS OF FULL-TIME STUDY OR 8 YEARS OF PART-TIME STUDY.

(h) EACH GRADUATE RECIPIENT OF A SCHOLARSHIP UNDER THIS SECTION MAY HOLD THE AWARD FOR 5 YEARS OF FULL-TIME STUDY OR 8 YEARS OF PART-TIME STUDY.”