

SB691.pdf

Uploaded by: A.Kaye Kenney

Position: FAV



WICOMICO COUNTY, MARYLAND

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

P.O. BOX 870

SALISBURY, MARYLAND 21803-0870

410-548-4801

FAX: 410-548-4803

Bunky Luffman
Director of Administration

Matt Leitzel
Assistant Director of Administration

Julie M. Giordano
County Executive

February 14, 2024

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Support SB 691

Dear Senator Feldman:

I am writing in support of SB 691 Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention Legislation. This bill would be helpful with encouraging younger people in choosing to become a member of their local fire company. Having 100% of the cost of tuition and mandatory fees at in-state community colleges covered would be a real enticement for recruitment.

Modeled after the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Police Officers, having a program for awarding student loan assistance to firefighters and EMS personnel will be an incentive for retention for those who have been members of the fire service to continue.

By aiding with financial educational assistance would be a first step to increase the capacity of Maryland's fire fighter and emergency service workforce which would help in keeping our communities safe.

We would be grateful for your assistance in helping this bill be passed.

Respectfully,

WICOMICO COUNTY, MARYLAND



Julie M. Giordano
County Executive

Written Testimony - SB 691 Higher Education - Fire

Uploaded by: Carol Riley-Alexander

Position: FAV

**Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair**

**Written Testimony – SUPPORT - Senate Bill 691
Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention –
Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance**

**Mr. Paul Edwards, Chairman
Board of Garrett County Commissioners
February 28, 2024**

On behalf of the Board of County Commissioners for Garrett County, I wish to offer our support for SB 691 – Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance.

This Bill is the work product of the *Commission to Advance & Strengthen Firefighting & EMS Within Maryland* (the Commission), which is comprised of nearly all stakeholders within Maryland’s firefighter ecosystem. The Commission’s final report provided data on the current state of Maryland firefighter and EMS personnel recruitment and retention, as well as several recommendations to fortify Maryland’s emergency response capacity.

Aggressive recruitment and retention efforts for Maryland’s firefighter and EMS workforce are needed to ensure these essential functions are fully staffed including:

1. Strengthens the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program
 - Expands program to cover 100% of the cost of tuition/mandatory fees at in-state community colleges and undergraduate education, and 50% of tuition and mandatory fees for graduate education.
 - Expands the programs which qualify for funding, reflecting the needs of our modern emergency response networks.
 - Clarifies that funding for the program is to be used after all other grants, scholarships, and financial aid (excluding student loans) are awarded and 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 the Maryland Higher Education Commission (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 to evaluate the feasibility of:
 - A program to extend coverage through health insurance offerings to qualified fire fighters who do not receive comparable coverage through their employment in that capacity.
 - 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.

Garrett County strongly supports Senate Bill 691 and urges the Committee to give a **FAVORABLE** report. Thank you for your time and consideration in this very important matter. Please let me know if you have any questions or need further information.

2024.02.28 Written Testimony in Support of MACo Fi

Uploaded by: Devyn Kiszewski

Position: FAV



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Fire/EMS Department Headquarters

Angela D. Alsobrooks
County Executive

Office of the Fire Chief

February 27, 2024

Maryland Senate
Education, Energy, & Environment Committee
EEE Committee Room
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

To Whom It May Concern,

I am submitting written testimony in favor of Senate Bill 691 "Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance." This Bill is the work product of the Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Within Maryland, of which I was the Co-Chair. This Commission comprised of stakeholders from numerous Fire/EMS Departments and affiliated organizations throughout Maryland. The Commission worked for months to develop suggestions to enhance the recruitment and retention of Fire/EMS members throughout the state, including those represented in Senate Bill 691.

This Bill will strengthen the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program by expanding the program to cover 100% of the cost of tuition and mandatory fees for in-state community college and for undergraduate education, as well as 50% of tuition and mandatory fees for graduate education. It will also expand the number of programs that qualify for funding while clarifying the terms of the funding. Additionally, this Bill will create the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Firefighters and EMS Providers, which is modeled after the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Police Officers. Finally, Senate Bill 691 will explore additional recommendations from the Commission related to childcare and healthcare. Firefighter and EMT access to adequate childcare and healthcare was identified as a critical barrier to recruitment and retention, and this bill will allow for continued investigation and analysis of these proposed solutions.

**9201 Basil Court, 4th Floor East
Largo, Maryland 20774
VOICE - (301) 883-5200 FAX - (301) 883-5212 TDD - (301) 925-5167**



Thank you for your review and favorable consideration of State Bill 691, which contains initiatives especially critical during a nationwide firefighter shortage. Successful recruitment and retention of firefighters and EMTs throughout the state is critical to the safety and wellbeing of all Marylanders. Your support will make a positive difference for Firefighters, EMTs, and communities statewide.

Sincerely,



Tiffany D. Green,
Fire Chief

Support for SB 691 - Firefighters and EMS Retentio

Uploaded by: Diana Purnell

Position: FAV



Worcester County Government

One West Market Street | Room 1103 | Snow Hill MD 21863-1195

(410) 632-1194 | (410) 632-3131 (fax) | admin@co.worcester.md.us | www.co.worcester.md.us

February 26, 2024

Senator Brian J. Feldman
Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
brian.feldman@senate.state.md.us

Senator Cheryle C. Kagan
Education, Energy, and Env. Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
Cheryl.Kagan@senate.state.md.us

Dear Education, Energy, and Environment Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members:

The Worcester County Commissioners unanimously support SB 691 Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance. Fire and ambulance companies operating in Worcester County have been struggling to attract, train, and retain fire and emergency medical service (EMS) personnel. This critical workforce shortage in Worcester County and across the state is unsustainable and could result in increased fire and EMS response times and threaten patient care.

The ability to cover 100% of tuition costs at a two-year institution or 50% of tuition costs at a four-year institution through the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Fund will be a powerful tool for attracting and retaining highly qualified fire and EMS staff. We thank you for your consideration of this request and urge you to support this vital legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony W. Bertino, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.
President

cc: Senator Mary Beth Carozza
Delegate Wayne Hartman
Delegate Charles Otto

SB0691-EEE_MACo_SUP.pdf

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 691

Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Education, Energy and the Environment
Committee

Date: February 28, 2024

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 691. This bill is one of MACo's top legislative priorities and seeks to implement several of the recommendations from the 2023 Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and EMS Within Maryland.

Today, when Marylanders dial 9-1-1, there is an expectation that first responders will arrive within a matter of minutes and instantaneously deliver care. Marylanders have rightfully grown to rely on this service as it has become a core pillar of a functioning society. However, that pillar is eroding and in more and more pockets of the state, emergency response times are starting to creep up. No one is more cognizant, or more concerned with this growing trend than Maryland's 24 counties.

For two years, MACo has spearheaded an all-hands-on-deck, multistakeholder collaborative effort - to call attention to and find solutions for Maryland's fire and emergency medical services (EMS) recruitment and retention crisis. This effort led to the 2023 creation of the Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and EMS Within Maryland, which included the Maryland Association of Counties, Maryland Municipal League, Maryland State Firemen's Association, International Association of Firefighters, Maryland Fire Rescue Institute, Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems, Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association, and the Maryland Fire Chiefs Association. The Commission's final report provided data on the current state of Maryland firefighter and EMS personnel recruitment and retention, as well as several recommendations to fortify Maryland's emergency response capacity.

SB 691 seeks to implement several of the recommendations from the Commission. Specifically,

#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 that qualify for funding, reflecting the needs of 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 to evaluate the feasibility of:
 - a program to extend coverage through health insurance offerings for state employees to qualified firefighters 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.
 - 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 due to a number of drafting errors, as well as to streamline implementation.

Amendment #1 – Corrects drafting error related to intent.

Amendment Language:

On page 3, in lines 28-29, strike line 28 and line 29 through “undergraduate student” and INSERT:
“(2) 100% OF THE EQUIVALENT ANNUAL TUITION AND MANDATORY FEES OF A RESIDENT UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AND 50% OF THE EQUIVALENT ANNUAL TUITION AND 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, INSERT the following as subsection (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 INSERT:

“(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.”

SB 691 is the result of two years of work aimed at ensuring that when Marylanders call 9-1-1, they continue to receive a timely response. Without state and county coordination to address this crisis, counties are left with few tools to stop the critical decrease in our emergency response ranks. For this reason, MACo urges the Committee to give SB 691 a **FAVORABLE** report.

SB0691_MACC_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Drew Jabin

Position: FAV

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 28, 2024

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

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC), representing Maryland's 16 community colleges, strongly supports **SB 691**, which expands an existing scholarship program and establish a new loan repayment program for Maryland's firefighters and emergency medical services (EMS).

First and foremost, firefighters and emergency medical services (EMS) providers play a vital role in ensuring public safety and well-being. They risk their lives daily to protect communities from fires, accidents, and other emergencies. By supporting loan forgiveness programs, we recognize and appreciate their dedication and sacrifice.

Additionally, investing in the education and professional development of firefighters and EMS providers strengthens the emergency services workforce. These individuals require specialized training and certification to effectively perform their duties. By alleviating the burden of student loans, we make it more feasible for individuals to pursue careers in these critical fields, thereby ensuring that our communities have a skilled and capable emergency response team.

Furthermore, loan forgiveness programs can help address recruitment and retention challenges within the firefighting and EMS profession. Many individuals may be deterred from pursuing careers in these fields due to the high cost of education and the burden of student debt. By offering financial incentives such as loan forgiveness, we can attract more qualified candidates to these professions and encourage experienced professionals to remain in the field.

In conclusion, supporting loan forgiveness programs for firefighters is not only a gesture of appreciation for their service but also a strategic investment in public safety and workforce development. Accordingly, MACC urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** vote on **SB 691**.

For questions, please contact Brad Phillips (bphillips@mdacc.org) or Drew Jabin (djabin@mdacc.org).

SB 0691, FAV, FCG, Joint, LS24.pdf

Uploaded by: Jessica Fitzwater

Position: FAV

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive



Brad W. Young
County Council President

FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

SB 691 – Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance

DATE: February 28, 2024
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
POSITION: Support

As the County Executive and County Council President of Frederick County, we urge the committee to give SB 691 a FAVORABLE report.

This bill is the work product of the Commission to Advance & Strengthen Firefighting & EMS (the Commission), which comprised nearly all stakeholders within Maryland's firefighter ecosystem, including: the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo), the Maryland Municipal League (MML), the Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA), the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), the Maryland Professional Fire Fighters Association (PFFM), the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI), the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS), the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association, and the Maryland Fire Chiefs Association. The Commission's final report provided data on the current state of Maryland firefighter and EMS personnel recruitment and retention, as well as several recommendations to fortify Maryland's emergency response capacity.

Public safety, including fire service and emergency medical service, is a core function of local government. As communities grow and change, the demand on our public safety services evolves, and yet, recruitment and retention of firefighters and EMS staff is an ongoing challenge. For many communities in Maryland, the average 9-1-1 response times are above the national average. If current recruitment and retention trends continue, very soon many Marylanders may not receive the timely response to a 9-1-1 call that they rightfully expect. Aggressive recruitment and retention efforts for Maryland's firefighter and EMS workforce are needed to ensure these essential functions are fully staffed.

SB691 assists with firefighter and EMS recruitment and retention by strengthening the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program, creating the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Firefighters and EMS providers. This bill also explores additional recommendations from the Commission related to childcare and healthcare.

SB 691 is the first step in increasing the capacity of Maryland's firefighter and emergency services workforce, which in turn, will keep our communities safe. Frederick County strongly supports this bill and urges the Committee to give SB 691 a FAVORABLE report.

Sincerely,

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive

Brad W. Young
County Council President

F - SB691 Testimony-2.pdf

Uploaded by: Malcolm Augustine

Position: FAV

MALCOLM AUGUSTINE
Legislative District 47
Prince George's County

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

Executive Nominations Committee

Education, Energy and the
Environment Committee



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 214
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3745 · 301-858-3745
800-492-7122 Ext. 3745
Fax 410-841-3387 · 301-858-3387
Malcolm.Augustine@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 28, 2024

**Senate Bill 691- Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention –
Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance**

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present **Senate Bill 691- Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance**, which seeks to address the pressing needs of our firefighting and emergency medical services (EMS) in Maryland. These bills are the culmination of the dedicated efforts of the Commission to Advance & Strengthen Firefighting & EMS Within Maryland, a collaborative initiative that engaged key stakeholders, including MACo, MML, MSFA, IAFF/PFFM, MFRI, MIEMSS, Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association, and the Maryland Fire Chiefs Association. The Commission's exhaustive report not only sheds light on the current state of Maryland's firefighter and EMS personnel recruitment and retention but also presents crucial recommendations to fortify our state's emergency response capacity.

It is essential to emphasize that, despite Maryland's average 911 response times exceeding the national average, there is a growing concern in numerous communities where timely responses are not the norm. The persistence of current recruitment and retention trends could soon lead many Marylanders to experience the distressing reality of calling 911 without receiving the prompt response they rightfully expect.

Senate Bill 691 aims to strengthen the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program. This includes expanding the program to cover 100% of the cost of tuition and mandatory fees for in-state community colleges and undergraduate education, with 50% coverage for graduate education. The program's scope will also be broadened to encompass a range of programs aligning with the evolving needs of modern emergency response networks. Additionally, funding clarification stipulates that it should be utilized after all other grants, scholarships, and financial aid (excluding student loans) are awarded, and a first-come, first-serve basis for funding allocation will be implemented. The legislation proposes the creation of the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Firefighters and EMS Providers. This innovative program mirrors the successful model for police officers, awarding student loan assistance to firefighters and EMS personnel based on years of service, rank, and criteria established by MHEC.

MALCOLM AUGUSTINE
Legislative District 47
Prince George's County

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

Executive Nominations Committee

Education, Energy and the
Environment Committee



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 214
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3745 · 301-858-3745
800-492-7122 Ext. 3745
Fax 410-841-3387 · 301-858-3387
Malcolm.Augustine@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

This legislation also explores additional recommendations related to childcare and healthcare—a critical barrier to recruitment and retention. The legislation requests the Department of Budget & Management to evaluate the feasibility of extending health insurance coverage to qualified firefighters without comparable coverage through their employment. This could include a fully employee-paid option without direct cost effects on State premiums. Additionally, a cost-share program for limited childcare coverage to career and volunteer firefighters is proposed, with costs shared equally between counties and the state.

I have offered three amendments to enhance clarity and streamline implementation. The first amendment serves to rectify a drafting error related to the legislative intent, specifically aiming to enhance clarity regarding scholarship coverage for both undergraduate and graduate students. This amendment ensures that the language accurately reflects the intended scope of the scholarship program, aligning it more precisely with the goals outlined in the legislation. The second amendment addresses the allocation of funds by specifying that the initial \$400,000 designated for the program should prioritize certain emergency responder-specific degrees. This amendment directly responds to the request put forth by the Maryland Fire-Rescue Education and Training Commission, ensuring that the distribution of funds is strategically directed towards supporting degrees that align with the unique needs of emergency responders. The third amendment serves to rectify a drafting error and brings clarity to the duration of scholarships for recipients at different academic levels, including community college, undergraduate, and graduate levels. This amendment ensures precision in outlining the permissible timeframes during which scholarship recipients at various educational stages may hold the award, promoting consistency and transparency in the application of scholarship benefits.

Senate Bill 691 represents crucial steps towards fortifying Maryland's emergency response capabilities. I implore your unwavering support for these bills to ensure the safety and well-being of our communities and uphold the reliability of our emergency services.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I urge the committee to give a **favorable** report for **Senate Bill 691- Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Malcolm Augustine".

Senator Malcolm Augustine

HB899-SB691 higher Education Fire-EMS.pdf

Uploaded by: Michael Cox

Position: FAV

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

02-20-2024 HCC Letter of Support for HB0899 and SB

Uploaded by: Patrick Vincenti

Position: FAV



COUNTY COUNCIL OF HARFORD COUNTY, MARYLAND

PATRICK S. VINCENTI
President

DION F. GUTHRIE
District A

JAMES REILLY
District D

AARON D. PENMAN
District B

JESSICA BOYLE-TSOTTLES
District E

TONY "G" GIANGIORDANO
District C

JACOB BENNETT
District F

*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

SB 691. Letter of Support .pdf

Uploaded by: Reuben Collins

Position: FAV



Charles County Government

CHARLES COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Reuben B. Collins, II, Esq., *President*
Ralph E. Patterson, II, M.A., *Vice President*
Gilbert O. Bowling, III
Thomasina O. Coates, M.S.
Amanda M. Stewart, M.Ed.

Mark Belton
County Administrator

February 28, 2024

Bill: SENATE BILL 691 Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance
Committee: Senate – Education, Energy, and the Environment
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chairwoman Kagan, and Members:

On behalf of the County Commissioners for Charles County, this letter is to express support for SB 691 – Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance. SB 691 provides a much-needed recruitment and retention tool for fire fighter and emergency medical services personnel. The U.S. is facing critical staffing shortages in EMS workers, which is undoubtedly a literal matter of life and death. Aggressive recruitment and retention efforts for Maryland’s firefighter and EMS workforce are needed to ensure these essential functions are fully staffed.

SB 691 Strengthens the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship Program with additional eligible educational expenses for career or volunteer firefighter or ambulance or rescue squad member. Additionally, SB 691 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).

Local governments, and Charles County in particular, need the General Assembly to assist us with finding additional ways to keep firefighters and EMS personnel engaged in the field. SB 691 is the first step increasing the capacity of these essential workers, and ultimately keeping our communities safe. For the reasons stated herein, we encourage a FAVORABLE report on SB 691. Thank you for the opportunity to provide our support.

Sincerely,

Reuben B. Collins, II, Esq., President
County Commissioners of Charles County

cc: Charles County Delegation

Testimony in support of SB0691.pdf

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

3/6/2024

Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON SB#/0691- POSITION: FAVORABLE

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

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#/0691, Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance

This bill seeks to provide additional methods to overcome the critical shortage of first responders by assisting funding educations for individuals choosing a career as a first responder.

The shortages is becoming critical. As reported by WBAL on June 21, 2023, *Number of first responders in Baltimore City is dwindling.*¹ Their report notes in Baltimore City:

"It's the shortage of EMTs and paramedics that is very stressing to the membership. It puts a huge strain on the workload our members are working. They're working tons of extra shifts and it's just continuing to plague our membership with burnout," said union president Richard Langford.

Despite the budget crisis overall in Maryland this bill is more than just an expenditure, it is an INVESTMENT in the future of Maryland. The safety and health of Marylanders is at risk when we do not have adequate first responder staffing in any jurisdiction. Assisting persons to get as much help financially when pursuing these careers may make possible recruitment of new workers and facilitate keeping existing staff through relief from financial burdens they might have from entering the field.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#/0691.

¹ <https://www.wbaltv.com/article/baltimore-emt-paramedic-shortage-recruitment-2023/44067147>

SB691 Support Letter001.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Jarrell

Position: FAV



*Queen
Anne's
County*

**THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY**

The Liberty Building
107 North Liberty Street
Centreville, MD 21617

e-mail: QACCommissioners&Administrator@qac.org

County Commissioners:

James J. Moran, At Large
Jack N. Wilson, Jr., District 1
J. Patrick McLaughlin, District 2
Philip L. Dumenil, District 3
Christopher M. Corchiarino, District 4

*County Administrator: Todd R. Mohn, PE
Executive Assistant to County Commissioners: Margie A. Houck
County Attorney: Patrick Thompson, Esquire*

February 27, 2024

The Honorable Brian Feldman
Chairman, Education, Energy
and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SB691 – Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance **SUPPORT**

Dear Chairman Feldman,

Please consider this letter of support for Senate Bill 691. This bill is the work product of the *Commission to Advance & Strengthen Firefighting & EMS Within Maryland* (the Commission), which comprised nearly all stakeholders within Maryland's firefighter ecosystem, including: the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo), the Maryland Municipal League (MML), the Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA), the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), the Maryland Professional Fire Fighters Association (PFFM), the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI), the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS), the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association, and the Maryland Fire Chiefs Association. The Commission's final report provided data on the current state of Maryland firefighter and EMS personnel recruitment and retention, as well as several recommendations to fortify Maryland's emergency response capacity.

While Maryland's average 9-1-1 response times are above the national average, there are a growing number of Maryland communities where this is not the norm. If current recruitment and retention trends continue, very soon many Marylanders may not receive the timely response to a 9-1-1 call that they rightfully expect. Aggressive recruitment and retention efforts for Maryland's firefighter and EMS workforce are needed to ensure these essential functions are fully staffed.

SB 691 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

- 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 used 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 the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC).
- This new program is modeled after the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Police Officers.

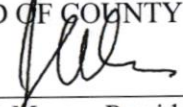
3 - *Explores additional recommendations from the Commission related to childcare and healthcare*

- 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 to evaluate the feasibility of:
 - 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.
 - 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.

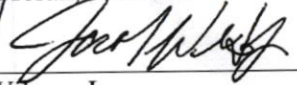
SB 691 is the first step in increasing the capacity of Maryland’s fire fighter and emergency services workforce, which in turn, will keep our communities safe. Queen Anne’s County strongly supports this bill and urges the Committee to give SB 691 a **FAVORABLE** report.

Respectfully,

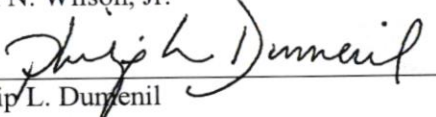
QUEEN ANNE’S COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



James J. Moran, President



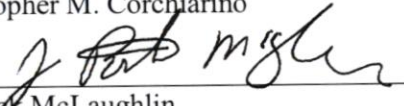
Jack N. Wilson, Jr.



Philip L. Dunneil



Christopher M. Corchiarino



J. Patrick McLaughlin

Anne Arundel County _FAV_SB691.pdf

Uploaded by: Steuart Pittman

Position: FAV



February 28, 2024

Senate Bill 691

**Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention -
Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance**

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

Anne Arundel County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 691 – Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance

Governor Moore has made clear that public safety is a top priority for his administration, and Anne Arundel County fully supports efforts to recruit and retain public safety officials. Marylanders have safe and thriving communities when we show our values and invest in our police, fire, and emergency service providers.

While Maryland can boast one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, public safety recruitment is still an area that needs to be improved. Local jurisdictions across the state have to compete against one another for quality public safety recruits, and this results in counties not having the sufficient personnel to safeguard our communities. Anne Arundel County is no stranger to this issue, and while we are taking necessary steps at the county level, more can be done.

Senate Bill 691 establishes the Maryland Loan Repayment Assistance Program for Firefighters and EMS, which will invest heavily in our local fire departments and ensure that our frontline public servants are valued and have the resources to stay within their jurisdictions. This bill also alters the Charles W. Riley Scholarship and expands accessibility to all higher education programs. These provisions will give hardworking firefighters and medical providers a financial and educational incentive to continue doing the dedicated work they do without dealing with debts that may force them to leave their profession.

For all of these reasons, Anne Arundel County respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** report on Senate Bill 691.

02.14.24 LOS SB 0691 Joint.pdf

Uploaded by: Terry Hale

Position: FAV

Danielle Hornberger
County Executive

Steven Overbay
Director of Administration

Office: 410.996.5202
Email: dhornberger@ccgov.org



Jackie Gregory
Council President

Robert Meffley
Vice President

Office: 410.996.5201
Email: council@ccgov.org

CECIL COUNTY GOVERNMENT
Cecil County Administration Building
200 Chesapeake Boulevard, Elkton, MD 21921

February 14, 2024

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 0691 – Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance
Letter of Support

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

The County Council and the County Executive of Cecil County unanimously support SB 0691 - Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance. The hearing on this legislation is scheduled for February 28, 2024.

It is our understanding that this legislation is altering the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship to make the scholarship applicable to all programs at institutions of higher education in the State; altering the maximum award available, when a scholarship should be credited, and to whom initial awards should be provided under the scholarship; establishing the Maryland Loan Repayment Assistance Program for Firefighters and Emergency Medical Services Providers; providing for the administration of the loan repayment program; etc.

Cecil County strongly supports this, and any bill, that creates programs that offers assistance to help us promote careers and higher education for our firefighters and EMS personnel for recruitment and retention.

The County Executive and County Council of Cecil County respectfully request that the Education, Energy and Environment Committee send a favorable report on SB 0691.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Hornberger".

Danielle Hornberger
County Executive

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jackie Gregory".

Jackie Gregory
President of County Council

SB 691_Higher Education_Firefighters and EMS Recru

Uploaded by: Theodore Delbridge

Position: FAV



SB 691 – Higher Education – Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention – Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance

Bill Summary: SB 691 modifies the Charles W. Riley Firefighter and Ambulance and Rescue Squad Member Scholarship to make the scholarship applicable to all courses at Maryland higher education institutions; increases the maximum award amount available; establishes a Maryland Loan Repayment Assistance Program for Firefighters and EMS personnel; and seeks to evaluate the feasibility of providing these personnel with health care and child care benefits through the State.

MIEMSS Position: Support

Rationale:

- Maryland’s firefighting and EMS services are provided by a network of more than 355 departments staffed by personnel trained to respond to, fire, rescue, and medical emergencies. Firefighting and EMS services are provided by full-time and part-time career and volunteer personnel. Career personnel who are employees are generally in more populated jurisdictions. While volunteers staff fire and EMS services throughout the State, they are heavily relied upon in rural communities. .
- There is no required State licensure or certification required for individuals to serve as firefighters in Maryland, although local jurisdictions may require certain qualifications. EMS Clinicians – Paramedics, Emergency Medical Technicians, Emergency Medical Responder, and Emergency Medical Dispatchers – are licensed or certified by the State Emergency Medical Services Board through the Maryland Institute for EMS Systems (MIEMSS) under the Education Article (Educ. § 13-516).
- Maryland’s firefighting and EMS services are understaffed in terms of both career and volunteer personnel, and the labor pool for these personnel is shrinking. The Commission to Advance & Strengthen Fire Fighting and Emergency Medical Services in Maryland (“Commission”) noted in their report that “...Maryland’s Fire and Emergency Medical Services are facing crucial skilled labor shortages and major disruptions in hiring...” (Ch. 655/SB 414 of the 2023 Session) (p. 6).
- The Commission identified improvements in financial support for personnel training / education and in working condition benefits as powerful tools that could be used to improve recruitment and retention of firefighters and EMS personnel.
- SB 691 will implement several Commission recommendations to improve financial support to firefighters and EMS Clinicians for education/training costs and potentially to provide health care and child care benefits to these personnel through the State of Maryland.

MIEMSS Supports SB 691 and Asks for a Favorable Report

BaltimoreCounty_FWA_SB0691.pdf

Uploaded by: John Olszewski

Position: FWA

JOHN A. OLSZEWSKI, JR.
County Executive



JENNIFER AIOSA
Director of Government Affairs

AMANDA KONTZ CARR
Legislative Officer

WILLIAM J. THORNE
Legislative Associate

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.

Maryland State Firemen's Association Support SB691

Uploaded by: Kathleen Loveless

Position: FWA

MARYLAND STATE FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Representing the Volunteer Fire, Rescue and Emergency Medical Services Personnel



Kate Loveless
Executive Director
2130 Priest Bridge Drive
Suite 4
Crofton, MD 21114
(O) 443-302-2911
(C) 516-666-2351
Email: KLoveless@msfa.org

February 27, 2024

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,

Kate Loveless

Kate Loveless
Executive Director
Maryland State Firemen's Association

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.”

SB 691 Written Statement 2024 Session.pdf

Uploaded by: Laura Vykol-Gray

Position: INFO



Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET
AND MANAGEMENT

WES MOORE
Governor

ARUNA MILLER
Lieutenant Governor

HELENE GRADY
Secretary

MARC L. NICOLE
Deputy Secretary

SENATE BILL 691 Higher Education - Firefighters and EMS Recruitment and Retention - Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance

STATEMENT OF INFORMATION WITH AMENDMENT

DATE: February 28, 2024

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

SUMMARY OF BILL: Senate Bill 691 would require the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to evaluate the feasibility of including firefighters who are employed or voluntary members of a fire or rescue entity in the State Employee and Retiree Health and Welfare Benefits Program (Program). Under the bill, firefighters may only participate if they do not receive comparable health benefits from the fire or rescue entity. Additionally, Senate Bill 691 asks DBM to evaluate the feasibility of a program designed to efficiently and effectively provide child care for firefighters who are employed by or are voluntary members of a fire or rescue entity.

EXPLANATION: The State currently extends group health insurance coverage to State employees and retirees, employees of satellite organizations (*i.e.* local governments), and nonprofit organizations listed in State Personnel & Pensions Article, Section 2-512. The Secretary is required to make determinations to ensure the Program adheres to federal compliance obligations and maintains its governmental cafeteria plan status. All participants under the Program have an employer-employee relationship established through being a State of Maryland employee, an employee of a qualifying nonprofit organization, or an employee of a satellite organization.

Extending coverage to individuals who are not employed by a participating eligible governmental entity, non-profit, or satellite organization will put the Program at risk of losing its governmental plan status. The consequences of losing the State's governmental plan status or coming into conflict with federal compliance obligations are exceedingly burdensome. The most severe consequence would be the loss of pre-tax payment features that State employees enjoy and depend upon. In order to carry out the Secretary's fiduciary duty to protect the Program from such drastic consequences, DBM, in consultation with legal counsel, makes determinations as to which entities may participate in the State plan on a case-by-case basis. Given the consequences, it is not feasible to include individual firefighters that are employed by or are voluntary members of a fire or rescue entity under the Program. Since this would be

the determination of any study conducted as required by Senate Bill 691, DBM does not believe additional study is necessary.

Additionally, the feasibility of providing child care to firefighters is not a topic within DBM's usual purview or expertise. DBM would recommend amending the legislation to remove this request from DBM.

DBM POSITION: INFORMATION WITH AMENDMENT. DBM does not believe a study on the feasibility of adding firefighters to the State's health insurance plan is needed as DBM has already shared the assessment in this document. Additionally, DBM suggests an amendment to remove the request for a study on child care for firefighters, as this topic is not typically in DBM's purview.

**For additional information, contact Laura Vykol-Gray at
(410) 260-6371 or laura.vykol@maryland.gov**