

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 black ink that reads "Malcolm Augustine".

Senator Malcolm Augustine