



February 9, 2024

Senate Bill 470

Growing Apprenticeships and the Public Safety Workforce (GAPS) Act

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

Anne Arundel County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 470 Growing Apprenticeships and the Public Safety Workforce (GAPS) Act. This Bill improves the existing Law Enforcement Cadet Apprenticeship Program by significantly expanding the purpose and scope of the program to address recruitment challenges faced across the public safety departments.

I believe our police department is among the best in the country, and I am proud of the quality of our officers and their service. However, despite having an incredible academy training program, exceptional benefits package, and one of the highest starting salaries in the state, we are still incredibly lean. Our county has 808 positions authorized, but our number stands at 766 today, a significant drop from the 806 high in 2020.

We already have the best academy, technology, and compensation in the area, but it's not enough to recruit more or stop them from looking for work elsewhere because serving the public as a police officer or firefighter is not an easy job. Irregular work hours and trauma place an incredible amount of stress on the individual and their families. A major component of this bill is mandating the Commission to develop mental health wellness policies to be implemented in law enforcement agencies in the State at every level. If we do not have a supportive environment to take care of those who are serving, no amount of recruitment effort is going to address the staffing shortage.

This Bill seeks to address both recruitment and retention challenges. More public safety agencies can take advantage of the grant to aid their recruitment effort through apprenticeships and help them foster a positive relationship with the public, especially young individuals. It also establishes an annual accountability system that will ensure the effective implementation of mental health wellness policies. For these reasons, I respectfully request a **FAVORABLE** report on Senate Bill 470.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steuart Pittman".

Steuart Pittman
County Executive