

House Bill 597

Date: February 2, 2024
Committee: House Judiciary Committee
Bill Title: Growing Apprenticeships and the Public Safety Workforce (GAPS) Act
Re: Letter of Support

The Maryland Department of Labor (MDL) strongly supports the GAPS Act, which will make our State safer and connect Marylanders to good-paying careers. This critical legislation will expand Registered Apprenticeship programs to grow our public safety workforce.

The bill amends §11–603 of the Labor and Employment Article to create the Public Safety Apprenticeship Program, which supports the creation and expansion of Registered Apprenticeship opportunities in public safety careers throughout Maryland. The legislation also requires the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to develop mental health wellness policies for law enforcement agencies across the State. Lastly, HB 597 establishes the *Growing Engagement in the Law Enforcement Workforce Working Group*.

As the State Apprenticeship Agency, MDL’s Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning (DWDAL) supports HB 597 and the creation and expansion of Registered Apprenticeship pathways for public safety careers.

The Department has been working to grow Registered Apprenticeship in the public safety sector for years, and the GAPS Act will allow us to expand those efforts. In 2019, the Maryland General Assembly passed the “Community Safety and Strengthening Act,” which established the Law Enforcement Cadet Registered Apprenticeship Program. The Program provided grant funding to develop Law Enforcement Cadet Registered Apprenticeship pathways and hire apprentices. While well intentioned, the Program has not met the goals of the initial legislation. Despite ongoing outreach and technical assistance, MDL has received zero grant applications to date. The GAPS Act proposes the following modifications to enhance the initiative and attract more applicants:

1. Expand covered occupations from only police cadets to any public safety occupation;
2. Remove income/residency eligibility requirements for participants; and,
3. Increase the grant ceiling for each apprentice to \$5000.

These modifications will support the growing demand for skilled public safety professionals and make Maryland safer. In 2023, MDL released the [Public Safety Apprenticeships Interim report](#), which found that State law enforcement and correctional agencies were experiencing persistent



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frontline vacancy rates as high as 14%. The Department projects an average of 10,453 vacancies every year through 2030 due to growth in the industry and people leaving the labor force (e.g. retiring) or switching careers.

Registered Apprenticeship is one of the strongest tools we have to prevent these future vacancies and ensure our public safety workforce reflects our communities and remains whole for decades to come. A review of the Baltimore County Police Department conducted by MDL, for instance, found that officers who entered as Registered Apprentices remained with the Department for an average of 16.9 years. Additionally, the Commission to Advance and Strengthen Firefighting and Emergency Medical Services Within Maryland identified Registered Apprenticeship as one of its [report](#) recommendations for filling workforce vacancies for firefighters and emergency medical services. These jobs lead to self-sustaining, high-paying careers that allow Marylanders of all backgrounds to have secure, stable futures.

Registered Apprenticeship is growing in Maryland, from 7,340 apprentices in October 2016 to 11,465 in January 2024. The GAPS Act will expand this growth into the public safety sector making Maryland a safer place to live and work.

The Department respectfully requests a favorable report from the Committee and is prepared to respond to questions.