



Maryland Municipal League

TESTIMONY

February 6, 2024

Committee: House Judiciary

Bill: HB 597 - Growing Apprenticeships and the Public Safety Workforce (GAPS) Act

Position: Favorable with Amendment

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League supports House Bill 597, with an amendment. This bill will assist municipal law enforcement agencies develop a more robust workforce at a time when police officer recruitment and retention is difficult.

As municipal police departments seek new ways to recruit and retain qualified officers most of the provisions of this bill help achieve that goal. In particular, increasing the maximum grant amount to law enforcement agencies when taking on an eligible apprentice under the newly named Public Safety Apprenticeship Program will make a larger impact in defraying costs. The goals of the program align with those of local law enforcement: provide a pathway to a career in public safety and foster better relationships between law enforcement and the public.

Creation of a workgroup to look into staffing issues in law enforcement is also a beneficial aspect of this bill. There are lessons to be learned and best practices to be shared that this workgroup can help highlight. MML is honored to be seen as a partner in this endeavor as evidenced by the municipal seat on the workgroup.

There is one aspect of the bill that we are seeking to amend, the mandatory adoption by law enforcement agencies of mental health policies developed by the Commission. Many of the municipal police departments in the State already have mental health policies that they believe best fit the officers serving their community and a state-wide policy may not work everywhere. The MML amendment turns the policy developed by the Commission into a model that may be adopted by local law enforcement.

MML Amendment: Page 5, line 4

(M) (1) THE COMMISSION SHALL DEVELOP MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS POLICIES AS A MODEL THAT MAY BE ~~TO BE~~ IMPLEMENTED IN LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES IN THE STATE BY:

The provisions of HB 597 should significantly assist municipal police agencies to better serve their communities through the development of their workforce. For this reason, the League respectfully requests that the committee provide House Bill 597 with a favorable report, with the above amendment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Theresa Kuhns	Chief Executive Officer
Angelica Bailey Thupari, Esq.	Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs
Bill Jorch	Director, Public Policy & Research
Justin Fiore	Deputy Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs