

WALKERSVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY, INC.
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Councilman Mason Carter
Frederick County Government
12 E. Church St.
Frederick, MD 21701

February 19, 2024

Subject: House Bill 1015

When the COVID pandemic occurred beginning in March 2020, the entire fund-raising program of the Walkersville Volunteer Fire Company, Inc. was curtailed because no fund-raising events were permitted. During this period, the expenses of the Fire Company continued to occur, requiring the Fire Company to use its reserves to sustain its operations in delivering fire and rescue services to the residents of Walkersville and surrounding areas. Given the uncertainty of the length of the pandemic, we began researching ways in which we could raise funds with little or no public contact. We discovered that organizations in many states were using online raffles to generate revenue. I sought confirmation from the Frederick County Permit office that online raffles were allowed under our current raffle permit. The Frederick County Permit office said that online raffles would be allowable provided that they complied with the Maryland Code Criminal Law Article 12-108, which states "an organization that operates a gaming event may not accept credit from a person to allow that person to play a gaming device at the gaming event". A gaming event is defined as a bingo game, carnival, bazaar, raffle, benefit performance or other event at which a gaming device is operated.

Our research indicated that other states allow the use of credit cards as an acceptable form of payment for online raffles. The State of Maryland has passed laws allowing for online sports betting. These sports betting firms, FanDuel for example, are permitted to accept credit cards as a form of payment to place bets on a wide range of events. Since the State of Maryland has already passed laws allowing for the use of credit cards in a gambling setting, the use of a credit card to pay for an online raffle or similar fund-raising event should also be allowed.

I then contacted your office for assistance in proposing a change to the current law that would allow non-profit organizations to accept credit cards as a form of payment for online gaming. We thank you for sponsoring the proposed legislation, which was unanimously supported by the Frederick County Council. It was then presented to our State Delegation at the December 2023 workshop.

Approval of this legislation is essential to the future fund-raising efforts of our organization. Our current operating budget is approximately \$300,000. Funding provided annually by the Frederick County Government is approximately \$130,000. The Walkersville Volunteer Fire Company, Inc. was incorporated in 1940 and has provided fire and rescue services continually since then to the residents of Walkersville and surrounding areas. The Fire Company, through its hard work, has been able to purchase all the apparatus we have ever used with funds generated from our fund-raising events. The current cost of apparatus replacement (more than \$2 million dollars for a new ladder truck) is pushing our organization to find new ways to raise funds to meet our responsibility to deliver fire and rescue services to those we protect every day. While we will never recover the lost fund-raising opportunities experienced during the pandemic shutdown, what we can do is develop new ways to raise funds with minimal public contact should another pandemic ever occur. The proposed law changes to allow non-profit organizations to accept credit cards as a form of payment for online gaming would be a significant tool we would use to generate funds to support our operations. This change would come at no cost to the taxpayers of the State of Maryland.

On behalf of the Walkersville Volunteer Fire Company Inc., I request that our letter be presented to the Ways and Means Committee in support of this proposed law change.

Sincerely,



James L. Graham
President, Walkersville Volunteer Fire Company, Inc.