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**Written Testimony submitted to the Maryland House Appropriations Committee
SB 396 - Public Safety Officer – Performance of Duties – Death and Disability Benefits
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SUPPORT

AFT Maryland strongly supports SB 396. This critical legislation ensures that public safety officers and their families receive the death and disability benefits they deserve when injured or killed in the line of duty.

Every day, Maryland's public safety officers, emergency medical responders, and 911 specialists, place themselves in harm's way to protect our communities. When tragedy strikes and an officer is severely injured or killed, we as a state must ensure their families are not left to struggle financially.

SB 396 enhances and clarifies existing benefits, guaranteeing that officers injured in the performance of their duties receive the full support necessary for their recovery. Likewise, the families of officers who lose their lives in service to our state should not have to navigate bureaucratic obstacles to secure the benefits their loved ones earned through their sacrifice.

Additionally, the bill recognizes the significant mental health challenges that public safety officers, including 911 specialists, face as a result of their duties. The bill establishes a presumption that an individual shall be presumed to have died as a direct and proximate result of an injury sustained in the performance of duties if the individual was diagnosed by a licensed medical or mental health professional with post-traumatic stress disorder, and the diagnosis was due to the individual's duties.

The passage of this bill sends a clear message: Maryland honors and supports those who serve and protect us. It ensures that when officers dedicate their lives to our safety, they and their families will be cared for in times of crisis. This is not just a matter of fairness; it is a matter of moral responsibility.

We respectfully urge the committee to give SB 396 a favorable report and stand in solidarity with our public safety officers and their families. Thank you.

