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Patrick Moran – President

SB805 Public Safety - 9-1-1 Emergency Telephone System – Definition of First Responders

**Education, Energy & Environment Committee
February 25th, 2025**

Favorable

Thank you, Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB805. This bill seeks to expand the definition of "first responder" under the Public Safety Article to include emergency response technicians, facility maintenance technicians, and vehicle services and recovery technicians employed by the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT).

AFSCME Council 3 represents MDOT employees who serve the State of Maryland in a variety of critical roles, and we firmly believe that this bill will recognize the vital contributions of MDOT employees who work on the front lines of public safety. Expanding the definition of "first responder" to include these positions is not only a matter of fairness but also of public safety.

Emergency response technicians, facility maintenance technicians, and vehicle services and recovery technicians employed by MDOT are often the first to respond to incidents on our roads. These workers are integral in ensuring the safe and swift recovery of incidents, whether it's clearing accidents, performing essential maintenance to keep our roads operational, or responding to vehicle breakdowns. Their work directly supports emergency medical personnel, law enforcement, and fire rescue teams by ensuring that roads remain clear, safe, and accessible.

Many people are unaware that MDOT workers are often the first to respond during snowstorms, such as the one on Monday, January 6th, and other severe weather events. These dedicated employees play a crucial role in ensuring public safety and are on the frontlines performing essential tasks, including:

- **Snow and Ice Removal:** When a snowstorm hits, MDOT's highway maintenance crews are deployed immediately to clear roads, highways, and interstates. This includes spreading salt, sanding, and using plows to remove snow and ice. Their swift response helps prevent accidents and allows other emergency responders, such as fire, medical, and police teams, to safely reach affected areas.

- **Vehicle Assistance and Recovery:** MDOT vehicle services and recovery technicians are on standby during snowstorms to help with stranded vehicles. Whether it's a breakdown or an accident, these workers are essential in providing recovery and clearing vehicles from roads, ensuring that traffic can continue to flow safely and that emergency vehicles can pass through without obstruction. This is all under the Coordinated Highways Action Response Team (CHART).
- **Road Maintenance and Safety:** MDOT's facility maintenance technicians ensure that roads and infrastructure remain safe and operational during adverse weather conditions. This can involve monitoring road conditions, addressing structural issues that may be caused by the storm (such as ice dams, road collapses, or drainage problems), and making sure that road signs and signals are working properly, which is especially crucial during snow and ice events.

Job classifications within the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) include varied roles essential to maintaining public safety and infrastructure. An Emergency Response Technician (ERT) provides immediate support during emergencies, including assisting responders, managing hazardous materials, controlling traffic, and clearing debris. A Facility Maintenance Technician ensures the maintenance and safety of state highways, assists with lane closures, performs groundskeeping tasks like landscaping and snow removal, and coordinates with other departments for larger repair projects. The Vehicle Service and Recovery Technician (HEMT) handles roadside assistance and recovery for MDOT's fleet, ensuring equipment is in working order and aiding in vehicle recovery after accidents or incidents on state-owned roadways.

These dedicated workers frequently face hazardous conditions while performing their jobs in high-stress situations, often putting their safety at risk to ensure the safety and well-being of the public. Recognizing them as first responders is an important step in acknowledging their significant contributions to the public good and ensuring they receive the recognition and support they deserve.

HB805 will help ensure that the workers who are actively involved in the recovery and maintenance of our roadways are seen as essential to our emergency response infrastructure. By officially designating these MDOT employees as first responders, we can also provide them with the recognition, resources, and protections that are due to those who are essential to the safety and well-being of Maryland's citizens.

We urge the Committee to give a favorable report to SB805.