

**Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1544, Public Safety - Maryland Law Enforcement Public Service Medal and Key Bridge Collapse Victims Memorial Tribute. The tragic collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge on March 26, 2024, was a devastating event that took the lives of six hardworking individuals and tested the strength of our emergency response teams. In the face of this disaster, our law enforcement officers demonstrated exceptional courage, risking their lives to save others. Their bravery deserves to be recognized in a meaningful and lasting way.

HB 1544 seeks to establish the Maryland Law Enforcement Public Service Medal as the highest state honor awarded to law enforcement officers who demonstrate extraordinary valor and selflessness. This medal will be awarded to those who have gone above and beyond the call of duty—officers who have sacrificed their lives to save others, prevent significant crimes, or respond to critical emergencies. By establishing a formal nomination, selection, and awarding process, we ensure that those who embody the highest ideals of public service receive the recognition they deserve.

In response to the will of the HGO Committee, I introduced an amendment to broaden the bill's scope beyond law enforcement. This amendment proposes the creation of two additional honors: the Maryland Highway Worker Public Service Medal and the Maryland Pilot Public Service Medal. These additions aim to recognize the extraordinary service of the vital contributions of highway workers and maritime pilots during the Key Bridge collapse. Due to time constraints, we were unable to introduce the amendment in the House.

This legislation, including these amendments, will ensure that the extraordinary contributions of all public servants who risk their lives during times of crisis are appropriately honored. Additionally, it mandates an annual ceremony to remember both the victims of the Key Bridge collapse and the heroic efforts of those who responded, keeping their memory alive for future generations.

By passing HB 1544, we send a clear message of gratitude and respect to all public servants who put their lives on the line daily to keep us safe. We also reaffirm our commitment to honoring those lost in the Key Bridge tragedy. I request that the committee give a favorable report on HB 1544.

Thank you