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Good Afternoon,

I'm Colin Campbell, an Assistant State's Attorney with Howard County. I'm here to express strong support for HB 0943 and extend my gratitude to Delegate Toles for sponsoring this crucial bill.

As an ASA since 2018, I've prosecuted criminal cases including arson. I've been a volunteer firefighter at the Providence Volunteer Fire Company in Baltimore County for over 15 years and have completed the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute's Fire Investigator course, bringing a unique perspective to the table.

This bill seeks to remedy a significant gap in our legal system. No one would argue that the profession of firefighting is inherently dangerous. Firefighters bravely and willingly place themselves in harm's way to protect the lives and property of others. When someone decides to maliciously or fraudulently set fire to property of another individual it is foreseeable that emergency services will respond to extinguish that fire. But for that criminal choice and actions those brave firefighters would not be exposed to potentially life-threatening hazards. However, there is currently no mechanism by which to seek justice for a firefighter injured or killed in the line of duty due to an intentionally set fire.

From 2013 to 2022, ATF Bomb Arson Tracking System data reveals 35 reported injuries to firefighters during the suppression of fires classified as arsons in Maryland. In the past three years there have been five arson cases in Howard County resulting in firefighter injury. Unfortunately, the crimes of Assault and Reckless Endangerment do not adequately encompass these scenarios and thereby left the State without any meaningful avenue to seek justice for an injured victim. I personally had the defendant's motion for judgment of acquittal granted for reckless endangerment of a named firefighter where the bench found that was not the legislative intent of that charge.

This bill seeks to create that mechanism, allowing Maryland's prosecutors to seek justice for our injured victims who would not have been harmed but for the need to respond due to the criminal actions of the arsonist. By holding arsonists accountable for the injuries, they cause, the State can provide accountability, justice, and protection to the victims and their families while ensuring arsonists face appropriate consequences. Additionally, this legislation acts as a further deterrent toward eliminating the use of fire-setting for criminal goals.

In conclusion, on behalf of myself, State's Attorney Rich Gibson, the Howard County Community, and the prosecutors of the State of Maryland I appreciate your time and seek a favorable report from the committee on HB 0943.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colin Campbell", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Colin Campbell
Assistant State's Attorney