

**Written Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House Ways and Means Committee
HB 590 - Income Tax - Subtraction Modification –
Public Safety Employee Retirement Income
February 6, 2024**

SUPPORT

Chair Atterbeary and members of the Committee, AFT-Maryland asks for a favorable report on HB 590. Maryland has been a leader in reclassifying 911 specialists as “first responders” and we now ask that the 911 specialists be included in the Hometown Heroes Act.

Today, 911 specialists use highly specialized protocols, training and equipment to provide life-saving triage to citizens and vital information to field responders. They initiate medical instructions and play a critical role in emergencies during traffic accidents, commitment of violent crimes, and large-scale disasters.

911 specialists must be the calm in the storm. They often perform many functions at one time under stressful conditions. They are responsible for multi-channel radios, telephones and monitoring computer terminals. They must be able to communicate precisely and clearly in emergency situations, maintaining professionalism at all times.

In a study conducted by the National Library of Medicine¹ - 911 specialists were surveyed to better understand the health challenges of their jobs. The results of the study showed that participants exhibited high levels of physical health complaints, depressive symptoms, alcohol abuse, PTSD, psychological inflexibility, and emotion dysregulation, as well as issues with mental distress and dissociation.

Lack of resources, benefits and incentives creates a significant shortage of well-trained and experienced 911 specialists. The state needs to do more to recruit and retain personnel for this vital job. We ask for a favorable report. Thank you.

¹ Perez RA, Jetelina KK, Reingle Gonzalez JM. The Chronic Health Effects of Work-Related Stressors Experienced by Police Communications Workers. May 5, 2021.

