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TESTIMONY ON SB#0579- POSITION: FAVORABLE

Counties – No–Cost Preventive Cancer Screenings for Volunteer Firefighters

TO: Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0579, **Counties – No–Cost Preventive Cancer Screenings for Volunteer Firefighters**

This bill is personally important to me as my daughter-in-law is a firefighter. This bill will protect our first responders throughout Maryland in jurisdictions not yet covering this for their firefighters.

Statistics quoted in the Cobb County (GA) Government report *Firefighters & Cancer: A hidden danger in Public Safety*¹ discussed *The Link Between Firefighting and Cancer*

Firefighters are regularly exposed to toxic chemicals, hazardous smoke, and carcinogens. When buildings burn, they release harmful substances like benzene, formaldehyde, and asbestos—all known to cause cancer. Even after the fire is out, dangerous contaminants can linger on their gear, leading to prolonged exposure. The U.S. Fire Administration reports that firefighters have a 9% higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer and a 14% higher risk of dying from cancer than the general population ([USFA](#)).

In 2023, the International Association of Fire Fighters found that 72% of line-of-duty deaths among its members were caused by occupational cancer ([IAFF](#)).

Firefighters have an elevated risk for several types of cancer, including:

- Lung cancer from inhaling hazardous smoke
- Leukemia and lymphoma due to exposure to toxic chemicals
- Skin cancer from UV exposure and contact with contaminated materials
- Digestive cancers from ingesting toxins absorbed through gear or skin

For comparison, the cancer incidence rate for the U.S. general population is 440.5 per 100,000 men and women per year, with a cancer death rate of 146.0 per 100,000 ([Cancer.gov](#)).

This bill recognizes the dangers our firefighters face and will require counties in which a volunteer fire company is located to offer no-cost preventive cancer screenings in accordance with certain guidelines to volunteer firefighters volunteering with the volunteer fire company; authorizing a county to satisfy the requirement by providing a certain annual examination or applying for a certain grant; requiring the volunteer fire companies to maintain and provide to the counties in which the companies are located a certain list of volunteer firefighters; etc.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#0579.

¹ <https://www.cobbcounty.gov/news/firefighters-cancer-hidden-danger-public-safety>