



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive

SB 445 – Employment Standards - Firefighters - Payment of Wages and Payroll Information

DATE: February 18, 2026
COMMITTEE: Senate Finance Committee
POSITION: Unfavorable
FROM: The Office of Frederick County Executive Jessica Fitzwater

As the County Executive of Frederick County, I write with my concerns about SB 445 - Employment Standards - Firefighters - Payment of Wages and Payroll Information.

Prior to running for elected office, I was a public educator and a dedicated Maryland State Educator Association (MSEA) and Frederick County Teachers Association (FCTA) member. I am a firm believer in the value of organized labor and know firsthand how important collective bargaining is. Now in my role as the County Executive of Frederick County, I value the partnership Frederick County Government has with our local International Association of Fire Fighters unit. I was proud to sign a three-year contract with IAFF Local 3666 early in my term as County Executive.

Unfortunately, as proposed, SB 445 would undermine the relationship I have built with Local 3666 and remove much local authority over future contracts. **As proposed, this bill would eliminate local bargaining authority over firefighter schedules and overtime policies and instead establish a statewide mandate for uniform schedules and overtime policies based on a 42-hour shift schedule.** This shift schedule has never been a point of negotiation at our table.

The fiscal impact of SB 445 is significant. To meet the requirements of the bill, Frederick County would need to hire at least 150 new positions, including nearly 100 firefighters, 20 technicians, 29 station officers, and at least 4 battalion chiefs. While it is impossible to calculate the exact cost of hiring these positions due to the variation of rank, the challenges associated with recruitment, and the other unknown variables, we expect the **annual fiscal impact to be at least \$17 million.**

Unfortunately, based on current recruitment and retention trends, we do not expect to be able to fill the positions needed in the near term. This would require Frederick County government to pay overtime for additional hours past the 42-hour week. Depending on what rank and position each individual working overtime is, **the annual fiscal impact of meeting the bill's overtime pay requirements would be at least \$4 million.**

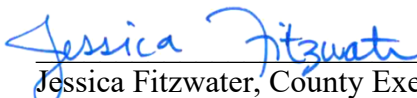
These fiscal impacts are striking, especially considering the substantial cost shifts to local governments in the proposed FY27 State Budget. Local governments like Frederick County do not have \$3 – 17 million in wiggle room in our budgets. Public safety is our second-largest budget item after education, and this increase would raise the public safety budget by nearly 10%.

Public safety is a top priority for local governments, but we have limited resources and many competing interests.

However, the fiscal impacts are not the only concerning outcome of this bill. Because of the challenges fire and rescue services across the country face in hiring personnel, we expect that these new shift schedule requirements will result in mandatory overtime and will limit our ability to provide full recommended staffing. I am proud that Frederick County has a robust and successful combination Fire Service. We have worked hard to improve our career service delivery to include the recommended staffing of four firefighters per fire truck. This bill would undermine these efforts and ultimately reduce safety for both our firefighters and residents.

SB 445 disrupts the long-standing collective bargaining process between local governments and the International Association of Fire Fighters. It would impose a significant financial burden on Frederick County and similar jurisdictions, and it would hinder our capacity to maintain recommended staffing levels and enhance service delivery to our residents.

I respectfully request that the Committee provide an unfavorable report.



Jessica Fitzwater, County Executive
Frederick County, MD