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SB0445

March 9, 2026

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of the Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 445: Employment Standards - Firefighters - Payment of Wages and Payroll Information

POSITION: UNFAVORABLE

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and Members of the Finance Committee please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **opposes** Senate Bill (SB) 445.

Senate Bill 445 would establish a maximum 42-hour workweek for Fire Suppression employees in Maryland. The bill provides two options for local jurisdictions to comply: negotiating a 42-hour schedule through the collective bargaining agreement between the union and the government entity, or requiring the government to pay overtime for any hours worked beyond 42 per week.

Baltimore's current Fire Suppression schedule consists of two 24-hour shifts during an eight-day cycle, with additional "impact days" worked approximately once per month. This schedule averages 46.3 hours per week and was established through a collective bargaining agreement reached in 2014.

That agreement involved meaningful compromise on both sides. The City benefited from the schedule because it required approximately 150 fewer full-time firefighters to staff operations, helping protect service delivery during periods of high attrition or slower hiring. The union also received significant concessions. In exchange for the longer workweek, union members received a 13.5% pay increase and saw their required annual appearances reduced from 209 to 101 days per year. It should also be noted that the 46.3-hour workweek remains well below the **Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) maximum of 53 hours** for Fire Suppression personnel and is comparable to schedules used in many large urban jurisdictions nationwide. The City has always paid overtime for hours worked beyond the agreed-to 46.3 hour workweek.

SB 445 would be especially damaging to the City of Baltimore for three primary reasons.

Cost

The bill would add significant cost to the City's budget without providing any measurable improvement in service delivery. Reducing the workweek would require the City either to pay overtime for the additional hours or hire approximately 150 additional full-time firefighters to replace the lost staffing hours. The estimated recurring cost would range from **$5.7 million annually** under the overtime option to as much as **$22.9 million annually** if additional personnel are required. For a City that already faces a constrained tax base, high property tax rates, and significant capital investment needs, imposing new recurring costs without a corresponding benefit to residents would be fiscally imprudent.

Operations

The bill would also create operational risks for the Fire Department and the residents it serves. Fire Department staffing levels fluctuate over time due to retirements, hiring cycles, and unforeseen events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving to a schedule that requires significantly more personnel would increase the City's vulnerability during periods of staffing shortages and could make it more difficult to fully staff fire companies when demand is highest.

Collective Bargaining

Finally, House Bill 532 undermines the local collective bargaining process. The current schedule was the result of negotiated compromise between the City and its firefighters. State legislation that mandates a specific outcome effectively bypasses the bargaining table and allows one party to seek through legislation what could not be achieved through negotiation. This undermines the balanced give-and-take that is central to collective bargaining and limits the ability of local governments and labor representatives to reach agreements that reflect local circumstances.

We would also like to address two talking points that have been raised by supporters of this bill.

First, some advocates argue that work schedules should be standardized across Maryland. However, jurisdictions across the State vary significantly in size, staffing models, and operational needs. Many counties operating under a 42-hour workweek rely heavily on volunteer firefighters to supplement staffing—an option that is not available to Baltimore City at the same scale. Local governments need flexibility to design schedules that reflect their operational realities.

Second, some advocates claim firefighters are "overworked" and that a shorter workweek would align their schedules more closely with civilian employees. This comparison is misleading. Under Baltimore's current schedule, Fire Suppression personnel receive five consecutive days off during every eight-day cycle, providing substantial time for rest and recovery, as well as opportunities for outside employment or personal obligations. Sworn fire personnel also have access to up to six months of paid leave for non-line-of-duty illness or injury, which provides an additional layer of financial protection.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge an **unfavorable** report on Senate Bill 445**.**