



Maryland Chiefs of Police Association Maryland Sheriffs' Association



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Sandy Bartlett, Chair and
Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Darren Popkin, Executive Director, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Andrea Mansfield, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Samira Jackson, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee

DATE: February 24, 2026

RE: **HB 471 - Public Safety - State and Local Governments - Use of Unmanned Aircraft**

POSITION: **OPPOSE**

The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA) and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA) **OPPOSE HB 471**. HB471 imposes unnecessary restrictions on the use of unmanned aircraft systems (“drones”) by state and local government entities, severely limiting law enforcement, emergency response, and public safety operations. While the bill aims to regulate drone use to protect civil liberties, an objective that MCPA and MSA fully support, this bill will have unintended consequences. HB 471 undermines well-established and effective drone programs in several counties across Maryland where drones have significantly enhanced public safety efforts. Restricting drone usage to only the enumerated circumstances in HB 471 would hinder law enforcement’s ability to respond to emergencies swiftly and effectively, ultimately putting communities at risk.

In the state of Maryland, there are several successful drone programs that support law enforcement, emergency services, and disaster response. Drones have been instrumental in enhancing situational awareness, reducing response times, and providing critical intelligence to officers in the field. For example, Montgomery County’s Drone as First Responder (DFR) program has already demonstrated its effectiveness, including in a landmark case where drone footage was the primary evidence leading to a conviction. Additionally, drones provide real-time intelligence that improves officer and public safety, allowing law enforcement to assess potentially dangerous situations before engaging. The program has consistently demonstrated its value, ensuring safer, more efficient responses to emergencies.

HB 471 severely limits approved drone use and will hinder the effectiveness of these programs by imposing rigid operational restrictions that do not align with the realities of law enforcement and emergency response. Many emergency calls, though serious, would not meet the restrictive criteria outlined in the bill, preventing the timely deployment of drones for critical situations. This bill would set back progress in public safety and diminish law enforcement’s ability to serve and protect the community effectively. While this bill’s end goal is notable, the means to achieve this goal will have consequences in

our communities and impede law enforcement's primary goal of public safety. For these reasons, MCPA and MSA **OPPOSE HB 471** and urge an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report.

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