

**Written Testimony Submitted to the  
Maryland House Ways and Means Committee  
By Cynthia Allen, 911 Specialist, Baltimore City**

**HB 13**

**Income Tax– Subtraction Modification – Public Safety Employment Retirement Income  
January 29, 2026  
SUPPORT**

Good morning, Chair Wilkens, Vice Chair Feldmark, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee. My name is Cynthia Allen, and I am a 9-1-1 specialist working for the city of Baltimore for the past 4 years. I am also a proud member of the City Union of Baltimore, AFT local 800, the union that represents a number of city employees, including our dedicated 9-1-1 call center specialists. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to HB 13, the bill that would include the state's first responders who work in our state's different 9-1-1 call centers into the Hometown Heroes Act and allow them a bit of a tax break on their retirement incomes.

A typical day for a 911 specialist is to be the vital link between the public and emergency responders, managing high-stress calls to send police, fire, or EMS to scenes rapidly. Key duties include gathering precise location/incident information (the 5 Ws: Where, Who, When, What, Why) and providing appropriate pre-arrival instructions. While acting as a critical link between those in need and necessary help. This role involves managing highly sensitive materials, navigating high-stress, fast-paced environments, and utilizing complex technologies like Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD).

The 911 Emergency Command Center is 24/7 which operates 365 days per year with three rotating shifts; morning, afternoon and overnight. I work the overnight shift which begins at 10:30 pm until 6:30 am. Each shift is made up of essential personnel. 911 center employees are classified as essential, requiring them to report to work during emergencies, inclement weather, and to work mandatory overtime or rotating shifts. Each shift is staffed with essential workers who must report to work daily as scheduled and committed to arrive in the call center on time respectfully.

911 dispatching is considered one of the most stressful professions in public safety, with over 90% of personnel reporting high emotional demands and stress due to daily exposure to traumatic, life-or-death situations; active violent events; child related emergencies; suicide and mental health crisis; talking callers thru CPR or child birth; helping someone deal with a loved one's death and abusive callers who are frantic, irate and screaming while trying to obtain critical information. This cumulative stress, caused by constant, high-stakes, and often graphic calls, leads to high rates of burnout, PTSD, and physical health issues.

As a 911 Specialist, we have to live through some of the most traumatic situations—having to help people through crisis situations that can mean life or death to them. For example: physical, sexual or emotional abuse; accidents (car or natural disasters), violence, sudden loss of loved ones, or family member and severe illness or injury.

Recruiting and retaining 911 dispatchers is extremely difficult, with many agencies facing critical crisis driven by high stress, burnout, and uncompetitive pay. Turnover, often exceeding 25% annually, creates chronic understaffing, forcing remaining employees into excessive overtime, which further increases burnout. For example: turnover and vacancies significantly disrupt workflow, leading to increased workloads, reduced productivity, and lower morale for remaining employees. Teams often face burnout due to covering extra responsibilities during hiring gaps.

The state recognizes the work 9-1-1 specialists do by classifying those specialists as “first, first responders.” That is precisely what a 9-1-1 specialist is, often the first person responding to life-threatening crises and are the first person a person experiencing a serious situation reaches out to for help. Specialists have to play multiple roles when they take that emergency phone call: having to appropriately assess the problem, attempt to walk the caller through safety steps, and identify the appropriate agency to resolve the crisis. As I am sure you can imagine, the job requires very skilled and highly qualified individuals who can work under extreme pressure, and far too often we have difficulties retaining people who are highly qualified to do this work.

We as a state recognize that other Hometown Heroes who act as first responders to very dangerous situations deserve a break on their taxes when it is time for them to retire; we are asking that we give those first responders who answer that 9-1-1 call be treated the same way. Again, we call for a favorable report to HB 13.

Thank you.