



## UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO


*Building a Better Life for Maryland's Working Families*

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### **SB 520 - Property Tax – Charter Counties – Application of County Tax Limitation on Public Safety Budget**

House Ways and Means Committee  
March 31, 2026

#### **SUPPORT**

Ray Lee, Special Assistant to the President, UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO

On behalf of the members of UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO, we respectfully submit this testimony in support of SB 520, which provides charter counties with a narrowly tailored mechanism to exceed property tax limitations for the express purpose of funding approved public safety budgets.

UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO represents thousands of public service workers across Montgomery County, including personnel in the Sheriff's Office, 911 Emergency Communications Specialists, Department of Corrections employees, and frontline staff who deliver emergency behavioral health services. Many of our members are the people residents rely on in moments of crisis — answering emergency calls, ensuring safety in our courts and communities, and providing essential mental health services to some of the county's most vulnerable residents.

The need for flexibility in funding public safety is not theoretical to us or our members. In December 2025, two of our members working for Montgomery County Health and Human Services who are assigned to the Mobile Crisis Outreach Team were dispatched to a volatile mental health call without a law enforcement presence. Upon arrival, they were confronted by an individual who threatened to kill them, violently attacked their vehicle, and ultimately stabbed a family member in front of the workers while they attempted to retreat and contact 911. Police did not arrive until after the situation had already escalated into a serious violent assault.

These employees were trained to respond to behavioral health crises, but they were placed in a dangerous situation without the resources, staffing, or coordination necessary to keep themselves — or the public — safe. Unfortunately, this incident reflects the broader reality facing many local governments: demand for crisis response and emergency services is rising faster than the systems designed to support them.



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Across Maryland's charter counties, calls for emergency response, behavioral health intervention, and crisis services continue to grow. In Montgomery County alone, more than 114,000 mental health-related calls were made to county helplines and 911 in 2024. At the same time, oversight reports have identified significant gaps in crisis response capacity and coordination. Addressing these challenges requires investments in personnel, training, coordination, and infrastructure.

Public safety extends well beyond traditional law enforcement or fire and rescue services. It includes:

- 911 professionals who serve as the first point of contact during emergencies;
- Sheriff's deputies who ensure safety in our courts and communities, assist victims of domestic violence, respond to individuals experiencing mental health crises, and apprehend fugitives;
- Health and Human Services professionals who respond to behavioral health emergencies, support survivors of domestic violence, and protect children and seniors from abuse and neglect.

Each of these roles is essential to maintaining the safety and stability of our communities. Yet too often, counties are forced to make difficult choices between maintaining adequate staffing in emergency communications centers, investing in behavioral health crisis response, or sustaining preventative services that help stop emergencies before they escalate.

This legislation offers a responsible and transparent solution by allowing a county's governing body — through a public and accountable vote — to exceed charter-imposed property tax limitations when necessary to fund approved public safety expenditures. This authority ensures that counties have the flexibility to make timely investments in the workforce, infrastructure, and services needed to protect residents and respond effectively to emergencies.

Importantly, this bill does not mandate any tax increase. Instead, it restores flexibility to local elected officials so they can respond to clear public safety needs without delay and ensure continuity of operations in critical service areas such as emergency dispatch, court security, crisis response, and protective services.

As public safety needs continue to evolve, counties must retain the ability to make strategic investments in the personnel and programs that safeguard their communities. This legislation provides a balanced approach that respects local decision-making while ensuring that essential public safety services — including those delivered by our members — are not compromised by rigid fiscal constraints.

For these reasons, UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO respectfully urges a favorable report.