

March 3, 2020

Testimony: House Bill 1225, Regulation of Amateur Radio Station Antenna Structures
Hearing: Environment and Transportation
Position: Support

Doug Wolfe
Amateur Radio Communicator

Mr. Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for hearing my testimony today in favor of HB1225.

My name is Doug Wolfe, and I am a federally licensed amateur radio operator.

This bill is crucial to ensure that emergency communication services provided by licensed amateur radio operators are available throughout Maryland for the public benefit in the event of a natural disaster or other major crisis.

Amateur radio operators and their stations are licensed by the Federal Communication Commission to operate on radio frequencies from home and mobile stations.

Today there are approximately 750,000 licensed amateur radio operators in the U.S. Amateur Radio activities are conducted for the most part from residences of licensees. The one absolute necessity for Amateur Radio stations to function is a permanent outdoor antenna that is effective, efficient and reliable, and ready to be used.

Amateur radio volunteers regularly offer their stations and skills for public service events, public gatherings, as well as emergency and disaster relief communications at no cost to disaster relief agencies or to taxpayers.

Amateur Radio is not intended to replace existing communications systems and it is not a “first response” radio service. Rather, Amateur Radio’s appropriate role is to quickly supplement existing public safety communications when those services are unavailable.

The widespread geographic distribution of residential amateur radio stations helps assure there will always be Amateur Radio stations inside and outside a disaster area, capable of reliable communication.

A station at a licensee’s residence without appropriate, effective outdoor antennas is a wasted resource and an emergency preparedness opportunity lost.

Two notable examples of amateur radio’s effectiveness in disaster response are Hurricane Katrina in 2006 and Hurricane Maria in 2017.

Lives were saved in both disasters because of Amateurs being able to relay information out of the impacted area and routing it to the appropriate emergency response service. In a post-Katrina report the Department of Homeland Security cited amateur radio as one of the few things that went right during the greatest natural disaster in U.S. history.

Local regulations which involve placement, screening, or height of antennas based on health, safety, or aesthetic considerations should be crafted to accommodate reasonably amateur communications, and to represent the minimum practicable regulation to accomplish the local authority's legitimate purpose.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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