



**HOWARD COUNTY PROFESSIONAL
FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION
I.A.F.F. LOCAL 2000**

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TO: The Honorable Delegate Dereck E. Davis, Chair
Members, House Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Richard L. Ruehl, President
Howard County Professional Fire Fighters Association

DATE: February 26, 2021

RE: **FAVORABLE** – House Bill 1247 – Workers’ Compensation – Occupational Disease
Presumptions – COVID-19

The Howard County Professional Fire Fighters Association, representing more than 440 active and retired professional fire fighters and paramedics who proudly serve the citizens of Howard County, Maryland, wish to offer our support, with amendments, House Bill 1247.

Our members have borne the lion’s share of first arrival, direct contact patient care of COVID-19 positive and COVID-19 suspected patients. Many of our members have ultimately tested positive for COVID-19 themselves or have been quarantined – sometimes on multiple occasions – due to suspicion of COVID-19 infection. This is an unavoidable hazard of our careers.

We cannot thank Delegate Washington and the other legislators who have filed COVID-19 presumption legislation enough for their efforts on behalf of fire fighters and paramedics throughout the State of Maryland. Your support is very much appreciated.

HB 1247, when compared to other COVID-19 presumptions bills, is preferable to fire fighters and paramedics because it *does not* contemplate rebuttability of the presumption. The issue of rebuttability for presumptions has already been addressed through judicial interpretation and does not appear elsewhere in Section 9-503 of the Workers’ Compensation statute. Other bills before the committee add rebuttability language for COVID-19 and our concern is that this could lead to arguments from employers that because such language was added with respect to COVID-19, it must mean the legislature intended it to be more restrictive than the current judicially interpreted rebuttability. This could ultimately mean that the COVID-19 presumption is negated and ineffective.

For these reasons, on behalf of the members of the Howard County Professional Fire Fighters Association, we encourage a favorable report on House Bill 1247.

Submitted respectfully,

Richard L. Ruehl, President
IAFF Local 2000