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The Maryland House of Delegates

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Health and Government Operations

HB990 Maryland Department of Emergency Management – Establishment and Transfer of Maryland 9–1–1 Board

March 10, 2021

For the last three years, as a member of the *Commission to Advance Next Generation 9-1-1 Across Maryland*, we have wrestled with the question of what was the most efficient and effective emergency management structure for Maryland. After much discussion with 9-1-1 Center Directors and in consultation with other states who have enacted similar changes in their states, the Commission unanimously recommended restructuring our emergency management structure as reflected in this legislation.

WHAT DOES THIS BILL DO?

- 1) upgrades the *Maryland Department of Emergency Management* (MDEM) to a cabinet level Department of the Executive Branch of State government replacing the *Maryland Emergency Management Agency* (MEMA). MDEM would report directly to the Governor.
- 2) transfers the *Maryland 9-1-1 Board* from the *Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services* to MDEM

WHAT IS THE NEED FOR THE BILL?

Currently, MEMA is located within the Military Department, which can create confusion during an emergency and the 9-1-1 Board is awkwardly situated with the prison guards as part of the Departments of Public Safety & Correctional Services (DPSCS).

As a Cabinet-level Department, MDEM would be able to more effectively communicate with the Governor during an emergency. It also makes more sense to house the 9-1-1 Board with other emergency management experts for easy access to critical public safety resources. In 14 other states (AK, CT, GA, ID, IA, LA, MS, ND, OK, OR, PA, VA, WA, and WV.), the 9-1-1 Board is housed within the State's emergency management entity.

In our current State of Emergency and during our Opioid Crisis, it has become clear that MEMA is the front facing agency coordinating valuable assistance, guidance and leadership to our local partners to strengthen our communities' preparedness. This realignment and partnership is vital to being prepared for future catastrophic events and will have a direct report to the Governor.

One of the key requirements for this move to be successful is the commitment that the 9-1-1 Board would continue to be autonomous. The 9-1-1 revenues could not be used by any other agency for any other purpose.

Previous actions recommended by the Commission and approved by the Legislature have increased the operations, training requirements and resources needed by each of our local jurisdictions for NG 9-1-1 operations. There are supports needed to implement those changes such as administrative and HR support to the Board to address the disparities in recruiting, training, and retaining 9-1-1 Specialists. MEMA would offer those services.

MEMA has also offered to help with procurement and technical expertise on issues like the 9-1-1 Board's online presence. There is a natural alignment of support services that MDEM could offer. This proposal should provide all advantages and no disadvantages to both entities.

Shifting the 9-1-1 Board as an autonomous entity within the new Maryland Department of Emergency Management will make more sense and allow both to be more effective.

The time has come for us to better align our emergency management operations in Maryland and I ask our Committee to favorably report HB990.