

**Steve Souder, Vice Chair, Next Generation 9-1-1 Commission**  
**HB 989: Public Safety - 9-1-1 Emergency Telephone System - Alterations**  
**Health and Government Operations Committee**  
**Wednesday, March 10, 2021**  
**FAVORABLE**

Chair Pendergrass and Honorable Health and Government Operations Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support of HB989/SB714: Public Safety 9-1-1 Emergency Telephone System - Alterations. It is my honor to serve as the Vice Chair of the Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG911) Commission, chaired by Senator Cheryl Kagan, and a Public -At-Large Member on Maryland's 9-1-1 Board. I have spent 53 years in the 9-1-1 community, including time as a director of the Montgomery, Arlington, and Fairfax 9-1-1 Centers.

The NG911 Commission has endorsed groundbreaking legislation to support the advancement of 9-1-1 in Maryland. As the national leader in NG911, the entire country is watching and replicating our upgrades. I am grateful to the members of the Maryland General Assembly for enacting 9 laws based on [2018](#) and [2019](#) Commission recommendations. I am hopeful that you will support SB714/HB989 based on the NG911 Commission's [2020 recommendations](#).

Needed updates include:

**Adjusting 9-1-1 Board Membership:** The composition of the 9-1-1 Board has been static since its establishment in 1979. As we shift towards the implementation of NG911, it is vital that we bring new interests into the fold. As detailed in HB989, the 9-1-1 Board would benefit from cybersecurity, finance, accessibility, and front-line 9-1-1 Specialist call taking expertise.

**Reporting 9-1-1 Outages When They Occur:** When 9-1-1 services are down, bad things can happen. When 9-1-1 is unavailable, there should be a predefined manner for carriers to communicate information quickly to our 9-1-1 Centers. The Maryland Joint Operations Center/MJOC (housed within the Maryland Emergency Management Agency/EMEA) should always be aware of something as critical as a 9-1-1 outage. A standard procedure will ensure that our counties can take the appropriate steps to keep everyone safe.

**Using Consistent Geographic Information Systems:** When we think of 9-1-1, we often conjure images of poles and wires. NG911 brings us into the 21st century. When a request for assistance comes from a mobile device, the call is directed to a 9-1-1 Center using data from Geographic Information Systems (GIS). HB989 would use nationally accepted standards when sharing GIS information. Providing consistency will provide a roadmap for those who do business with Maryland and provide a better service to those requesting emergency assistance.

**Implementing Kari's Law:** The idea behind Kari's Law came from a tragic event in Texas where a mother was assaulted and murdered by her husband in a hotel room. Their 9-year old child tried to call 9-1-1 (as she was instructed to do since elementary school), but she got nothing on the other end of the phone. Little did she know, she needed to first use "9" to get an outside line and then call 9-1-1. Large internal

systems like this tend to be used by large institutions and businesses (hotels, hospitals, colleges, etc.), but they have their faults. Kari's Law was enacted to require a small programming change to ensure that anyone can access 9-1-1 directly. Maryland adopted its own early version of Kari's Law but lacked proper enforcement. HB989 builds on previous recommendations by the NG911 Commission to ensure that there is widespread implementation and enforcement.

Investing in 9-1-1 Specialists: As we begin to use NG911 technology, our 9-1-1 Specialists will be presented with a body of information that they have never had before. Historically, 9-1-1 simply involved a voice call, but NG911 will allow videos, photos, and text messages. We all know how draining it can be day after day to deal with these horrible and tragic calls. We need to train our personnel on how to deal and cope with this trauma. This training will help reduce the high turnover rate and ensure that our Counties can hire and invest in our 9-1-1 family.

Reviewing Workers' Compensation: While psychological training is helpful, we must also study the need for Workers' Compensation to cover our "First" First Responders. The repetitive and cumulative impact of horrific calls take a toll on the physical and emotional health of our 9-1-1 Specialists. Additional information from a Workers' Compensation study would be a useful tool to determine the best way to support the women and men under the headset.

**I urge a favorable vote on HB989 to enact the NG911 Commission's important recommendations.**