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**Testimony HB509**  
**9-1-1 Specialist – Classification as First Responders**  
**Health and Operation Committee**  
**February 17th, 2021**  
**Support**

AFSCME Maryland Council 67 supports HB 509. This bill establishes a statutory definition for the term “first responder” and establishes the intent of the General Assembly that jurisdictions employing 9-1-1 specialists appropriately classify those specialists as first responders in recognition of the training, knowledge, and skills that they possess and demonstrate in answering and handling requests for emergency assistance.

Times have changed. Today’s 9-1-1 professionals look nothing like the past. They use sophisticated tools, like computer-aided dispatch, geographic information systems, and automatic vehicle location technologies. Training to use these services is extensive. Operators often undergo background checks and psychological testing to ensure that they are fully equipped for the stress of the job. Those who make the cut learn to not only ask questions but also to pick up on small audible cues — like the sound of a weapon reloading or the cries of an injured child. As a result, they know how to send appropriate response even when communication is limited. Many also have life-saving skills they have put to use while on the line, offering instruction to prevent choking with the Heimlich maneuver and providing help with cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Some have even assisted with emergency birth.

The men and women who serve in these roles deserve this classification. Their work is no longer clerical, it is an essential part of our emergency response. Just as we rely on our police, firefighters and correctional officers, 9-1-1 operators go to work every day to keep our communities safe.

For these reasons, AFSCME Maryland Council 67 urges the committee for a favorable reporting on HB 509 and give the 9-1-1 operators the respect that they deserve.