

MARYLAND STATE FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Representing the Volunteer Fire, Rescue and Emergency Medical Services Personnel



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Education, Energy, and the Environment
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Greetings from the Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA). As Executive Director of the MSFA, I am pleased to be here to offer my testimony in support of Senate Bill 414 (House Bill 0788). When we were approached by a representative from the Maryland Association of Counties last fall, the MSFA was eager to hear what initiatives would be brought forward. When SB 414 was introduced, the MSFA quickly responded with its support.

As we look at the current crisis of recruiting and retaining volunteer fire service members, we look at three main categories that affect our effectiveness at drawing in new members, and keeping the ones that we have; cost, culture, and commitment.

With the ever increasing cost of apparatus, cost to repair facilities, volunteer fire departments are now faced with astronomical fiscal impacts that their local fundraising efforts just cannot cover. Federal and local grants are helpful, but with more and more departments applying, the less funding there is to go around. The MSFA, with the help of its Volunteer Company Assistance Fund (VCAF), we can offer our member companies some financial relief but with those funds at an all-time low and no solid replenishment platform, the assistance we can provide is just not enough.

While we have seen tremendous strides in repairing fire house culture, many departments continue to operate and lose members due to antiquated ways of thinking and not embracing much needed shifts in the way we include others. The cultural divide among the older and younger members is a wall that is becoming more difficult to climb and bridging the age gap has become an obstacle many departments do not know how, or refuse, to overcome.

Although you will find committed individuals in every corner of the state, the difficulty in balancing careers, families and volunteering has made it less attractive to the younger generations. Training hours required for volunteers to ride on apparatus has increased twenty times over in the past 30 years. Volunteer burnout occurs when membership numbers dwindle,

and the weight of responsibility falls on the few. It becomes almost impossible for the members that remain to continue to provide the necessary services. We all know how small changes can create a domino effect, both good and bad. The critical dialogue is happening now where departments are facing closure due to lack of embracing a change in culture.

Recruitment and retention issues are not specific to Maryland. In recent years, our neighboring states of Pennsylvania, with their 2018 release of SR-6, and Ohio, with the more recent January 5th release of the Ohio Governor's Task Force of the Volunteer Fire Services Report & Recommendations, shared their common challenges and goals. Maryland echoes the statement put out in the Ohio Taskforce report that “volunteer fire departments should be adequately funded, properly resourced with equipment that meets the needs of the community and is housed in fire stations that are safe and built to current building standards. Sufficient personnel should be ready to respond to emergencies within a reasonable time.”

The study proposed in SB 414, which forms “the Commission to Advance and Strengthen Fire Fighting Within Maryland to study and make recommendations regarding the effectiveness and viability of certain incentives, offerings, or practices employed in other states to attract, support, and retain individuals in firefighting roles” is desperately needed to shine a light on our specific challenges, and what we all can do to ensure that our cries for help do not continue to go unheard. Our volunteer departments need us to be their voice and their champion to ensure that doors do not continue to close on their communities.

The Maryland State Firemen’s Association looks forward to being represented on this Commission and partnering with other state organizations to ensure that the invaluable services that our volunteer fire service personnel provide the citizens of Maryland continue and are supported through the years to come. We respectfully ask for a favorable vote on SB 414.

“Things are changing quickly and if we don’t adapt ourselves to these changes, we are going to be the ones who have failed the citizens that we joined the fire service to serve.”

-Daniel “Skip” Mahan

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Loveless". The script is cursive and fluid.

Kate Loveless
MSFA Executive Director