



# Montgomery County

## Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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HB 1143

DATE: March 28, 2024

SPONSOR: Delegates Bhandari, *et al.*

ASSIGNED TO: Finance

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POSITION: FAVORABLE (Montgomery County Fire & Rescue Service)

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### Emergency Medical Services - Maryland Emergency Department Wait Time Reduction Commission and Standardized Protocols – Establishment

House Bill 1143 establishes the Maryland Emergency Department Wait Time Reduction Commission to enhance the overall effectiveness and responsiveness of emergency medical services. The Commission will be comprised the Secretary of Health; the Executive Director of the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems; the Executive Director of the Health Services Cost Review Commission; the Executive Director of the Maryland Health Care Commission; and the following members, appointed by the Secretary of Health: two individuals who have operations leadership responsibilities over a hospital emergency department in the State; one individual with professional experience in an emergency department who is not a physician or an advanced practice provider; one representative of a local emergency medical service; one representative of a managed care plan with experience in care management or care coordination; one representative of the Maryland Hospital Association; one representative of a patient advocacy organization; and one representative of a behavioral health provider. By January 1 of each year, the Commission must report its findings and recommendations, including an update on the implementation of standardized protocols and operations efficiencies in hospital emergency departments. Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service (MCFRS) supports this much needed bill as it includes a representative of a local emergency medical service on the Commission. Battalion Chief Ben Kaufman from the MCFRS Emergency Medical and Integrated Healthcare Services Section has participated on the Maryland Hospital Association's associated task force over the past year. MCFRS would welcome continued participation in working on this issue as a member of the Commission as this representative.

Emergency Department (ED) crowding is a complex issue that results in multiple downstream and adverse effects on Emergency Medical Systems (EMS), such as rendering our transport units unavailable to respond to other 911 calls while waiting at an ED for a bed to become available for a patient. Hospital delays also increase costs: Montgomery County has proactively dedicated an EMS supervisor to oversee the distribution of ambulances so that no hospital gets overwhelmed by the volume of ED patients. This comes at a direct cost to the County which is not reimbursed by the State or hospitals. Montgomery County also incurs costs from EMS personnel whose shifts extend into overtime due to prolonged waiting times to admit patients into the ED. If the problem of emergency department overcrowding throughout the State is not addressed, we will ultimately need more EMS units and personnel. Additionally, hospital delays impact our volunteer EMS personnel: being detained at the ED beyond the end of a volunteer shift makes it difficult for volunteers to get to their primary jobs on time. Local volunteer fire chiefs cite this problem as a bona fide recruitment and retention barrier.

MCFRS has been an innovator at exploring solutions to these issues. In addition to the transport supervisor, MCFRS has implemented an alternative destination program and added telehealth services for treatment-in-place. However, there has been little success diverting a meaningful volume or the appropriate acuity of patients away from the emergency department. MCFRS strongly agrees with the need for the Commission proposed by House Bill 1143 and urges the committee to issue a favorable report.