



Senate Bill 700

Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System - Membership - 9-1-1 Specialists

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Budget and Taxation Committee

Date: February 22, 2024

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 700. This bill enables local governments participating in the Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System (LEOPS) to authorize specified 9-1-1 specialists to enroll in the LEOPS program.

In 2019, the General Assembly passed Carl Henn's Law, landmark legislation to update state laws, and the 9-1-1 financing system to provide the flexibility and resources needed to deploy a statewide Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG911) system that our residents expect and deserve. As Maryland transitions to NG911, counties would appreciate the flexibility to offer 9-1-1 specialists enhanced disability and retirement benefits through the LEOPS program.

Several local governments participate in the LEOPS program, an enhanced retirement offering recognizing the peculiar rigors of work in law enforcement. Members of LEOPS earn 2.0% of their average final compensation (AFC) for each year of creditable service. Vested members qualify for a normal service retirement benefit at age 50 or with at least 25 years of creditable service.

Maryland's county governments manage, operate, and fund twenty-four public safety answering points. These answering points are vital links between 9-1-1 callers and public safety personnel. In addition to gathering essential information from callers and dispatching the appropriate first responders, 9-1-1 specialists must take control of often chaotic, heart-wrenching, stressful, confusing, and frenzied situations.

The impacts of 9-1-1 work-related stress have made it difficult for counties to recruit and retain 9-1-1 specialists. SB 700 provides another tool for counties to incentivize potential recruits and retain current employees. Further, MACo appreciates that this bill properly leaves the decision to expand employee benefits in the hands of the local governments, which are best situated to determine whether such policies are in their best interest.

Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 700.