



Senate Bill 445

Employment Standards - Firefighters - Payment of Wages and Payroll Information

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Finance Committee

Date: February 18, 2026

From: Karrington Anderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 445. This bill would eliminate local bargaining authority over firefighter overtime policies and instead establish a statewide standard, resulting in a massive new unfunded mandate. SB 445 is a one-size-fits-all approach that threatens to undermine local operations, place an undue financial burden on county governments, and compromise emergency response services for Maryland residents.

Firefighter schedules, hours, and overtime are currently – and properly – among the topics collectively bargained between the local government and the employee representatives. In some jurisdictions, where the employees have prioritized a work schedule that leads to 42 or 40 hours per week, the bargaining process has allowed the county government to secure other trade-offs to make the needed service levels affordable. SB 445 fails to do this by substituting the State's judgment on this single element, and arbitrarily imposing an overtime standard with no regard to any offsets that could have been bargained.

Under SB 445, counties are effectively left with two options. First, they may maintain current staffing levels and be required to pay substantial and, in many cases, exorbitant overtime costs to meet existing service demands under a 42-hour threshold. For affected counties, this would result in millions of dollars in new, ongoing expenditures with no corresponding revenue source.

Alternatively, counties could attempt to transition fully to a 42-hour schedule by hiring a significant number of additional firefighters. However, this option is largely unrealistic. Counties across Maryland, and nationwide, are already facing serious challenges in recruiting both career and volunteer firefighters. In some jurisdictions, transitioning to a 42-hour model would require hiring scores of additional personnel. Given the current workforce environment, that level of expansion is simply not feasible, meaning unavoidable overtime costs to continue current service levels.

In short, SB 445 forces counties to either absorb unsustainable overtime costs or undertake large-scale hiring that current labor market conditions will not support. Both paths threaten fiscal stability and the reliable delivery of emergency services. For these reasons, MACo **OPPOSES** SB 445 and urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report.