



**CALVERT COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

175 Main Street
Prince Frederick, Maryland 20678
410-535-1600 • 301-855-1243
www.calvertcountymd.gov

Board of Commissioners
Mark C. Cox Sr.
Catherine M. Grasso
Earl F. Hance
Mike Hart
Todd Ireland

April 23, 2024

The Honorable Wes Moore
Governor, State of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB404 Wellness Checks – Requirements (Gabriel’s Law)

Dear Governor Moore,

Ensuring the timely and appropriate response of emergency resources is paramount for Calvert County, particularly in situations where lives may be at stake. We write to request your thoughtful consideration of the Maryland State Firefighters Association’s (MSFA) position on HB404. In its testimony on the cross-filed SB190, MSFA expressed opposition to amendments that would involve fire and rescue services in simultaneous response to certain requests for a welfare check. Specifically, they wrote, in part:

- The MSFA and volunteer fire service feel that we should not be included in this bill in any manner.
- Law enforcement is trained and equipped to handle a “wellness check” ranging from someone not answering a phone call to the call where the person in question is having a mental health issue.
- Fire, rescue and emergency medical entities are not trained to address mental health issues and not equipped properly should they arise. Just last week a fire department first responder was shot doing a “wellness check” in the duties of their job.
- The MSFA has asked their member companies and fire associations to respond and comment as to their thoughts on HB404. In the last 24 hours, we have had responses from 9 counties covering 143 fire companies with all being opposed with no company being in favor of the amended bill.

Despite the clear position of MSFA, HB404 was amended to include fire and rescue simultaneous response to certain requests for welfare checks.

As County Commissioners, we are concerned that the Fiscal and Policy Note does not reflect the impact on any county’s career fire and rescue professionals, as well as the burden upon volunteers. Since Jan. 1, 2023, Calvert County Emergency Communications have dispatched 2,472 welfare check calls. Of these calls, Fire/EMS was dispatched 354 times. We are equally concerned that the trigger for simultaneous response by fire and rescue is based upon an ambiguous, and undefined threshold of an expression of the existence of a “life-threatening condition.”

We urge you to consider vetoing this bill. Doing so will allow for its reintroduction with a Fiscal and Policy Note that accurately reflects the monetary costs and potential loss of volunteers to local governments, as well as the burden on volunteer services for simultaneous response with law enforcement. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
CALVERT COUNTY, MARYLAND

Handwritten signature of Earl F. Hance in blue ink.

Earl F. Hance, President

Handwritten signature of Catherine M. Grasso in blue ink.

Catherine M. Grasso, Vice President

Handwritten signature of Mark C. Cox, Sr. in blue ink.

Mark C. Cox, Sr.

Handwritten signature of Mike Hart in blue ink.

Mike Hart

Handwritten signature of Todd Ireland in blue ink.

Todd Ireland