



House Bill 397

Public Safety - 9-1-1 Emergency Telephone System (Carl Henn's Law)

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: February 26, 2019

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 397. This bill addresses a priority initiative of Maryland's 24 county jurisdictions. It will update state laws and the 9-1-1 financing system to provide the flexibility and resources needed for the deployment of a statewide Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG911) system that our residents expect and deserve.

Maryland's 9-1-1 system has performed admirably for decades. However, new data-rich communications devices and services are driving the existing 9-1-1 infrastructure toward its operational limits. The vision of an NG911 system is to enable the public to make voice, text, or video calls from any communications device via Internet Protocol-based networks. These capabilities can make public safety both more effective and more responsive.

Maryland residents demand and expect 9-1-1 emergency service to be reliable and efficient. Next-generation technology is required to keep up with this increasingly complex public safety function – improving wireless caller location, accommodating incoming text/video, and managing crisis-driven call overflows. Maryland must accelerate its move toward Next Generation 9-1-1, deliver these essential services equitably across the state, and assure effective coordination with communications providers.

The transition to NG911 cannot be achieved without significant funding to upgrade our existing 9-1-1 equipment and communications systems, which are already under-funded through existing user fees. According to The Commission to Advance Next Generation 9-1-1 Across Maryland, the State's 9-1-1 fee structure is grossly insufficient to support the current 9-1-1 system, let alone the deployment of NG911. In fact, local 9-1-1 fees cover just 37% of statewide operational costs, with counties relying increasingly on general revenues to supplement 9-1-1 funding. HB 397 would conform Maryland's fee structure to that of every other state and would provide an additional revenue source to offset 9-1-1 operational costs for the transition to NG911.

HB 397 urges a statewide effort to guide this critical transition, harnessing public safety industry leadership and expertise in order to create a common framework for the implementation of NG911 in Maryland. Accordingly, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 397.