



BILL NO.: House Bill 779

TITLE: Public Safety – 9-1-1 Emergency Telephone Systems – Prepaid Service – Collection of Surcharge

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: March 13, 2012

COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations

CONTACT: Andrea Mansfield

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** House Bill 779. This bill would reasonably extend Maryland’s current 9-1-1 charge to prepaid wireless services and ensure Maryland’s 9-1-1 system is appropriately supported.

The State’s emergency number system (commonly known as the “9-1-1 system”) is an integral part of emergency communication services ensuring that emergencies are reported and personnel are dispatched in a timely manner to deal with life threatening situations. Maryland has had a comprehensive 9-1-1 system in place since 1985, and since 2005, all counties have enhanced their systems to accept wireless calls and provide the call center with the caller’s location/address and phone number. Operational expenses and system enhancements are supported through a monthly State and local charge assessed per bill for land line and wireless telecommunication services.

Generally, users of devices that may access the 9-1-1 system are assessed a charge to support these systems. However, the current charge does not apply to users of prepaid wireless telephone service, essentially because State law applies the charge to a monthly bill, without a clear application to one-time payments without regular monthly billing intervals. MACo believes HB 779 outlines a reasonable approach for extending this surcharge to all individuals who benefit from these important services.

In addition, HB 779 specifies the distribution of this new revenue as 75% to counties for costs associated with maintenance and operations of local 911 systems and 25% to the enhancement fund administered by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. This distribution effectively mirrors the current distribution of charges levied upon land-line and monthly wireless phone service.

Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 779.