

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1544 (Delegate Bhandari, *et al.*)
Health and Government Operations

Public Safety - Maryland Law Enforcement Public Service Medal and Key
Bridge Collapse Victims Memorial Tribute

This bill establishes the Maryland Law Enforcement Public Service Medal as the highest State honor awarded to law enforcement officers for exceptional public service, valor, and heroism. The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) must establish a medal review committee to evaluate nominations and select medal recipients. The Governor (1) may award a maximum of four medals per calendar year to sworn law enforcement officers in the State who meet specified conditions and (2) must present the medals in an official State ceremony held annually in Annapolis. Medal production and ceremony expenses must be funded through (1) an annual appropriation contained in the State budget and (2) grants, private sponsorships, and law enforcement foundation support. A law enforcement agency must grant a one-grade promotion to an employee who receives a medal. DPSCS must convene the first medal review committee by September 1, 2025, and the first annual ceremony must be held by January 31, 2026. **The bill takes effect June 30, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: While the bill is not anticipated to materially affect State expenditures, as discussed below, State law enforcement agencies and the State House Trust may experience operational impacts. Revenues are not affected

Local Effect: While the bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government expenditures, as discussed below, local law enforcement agencies may experience operational impacts. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: Minimal or none.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The Governor may award the medal to sworn law enforcement officers in Maryland who (1) have demonstrated acts of extraordinary courage, bravery, or selflessness while on duty; (2) have risked or sacrificed their lives by saving lives, preventing significant crimes, or responding to critical emergencies; or (3) have significantly impacted public safety, including responding to disasters, terrorist threats, or significant public emergencies.

The medal review committee must:

- review nominations submitted by (1) State and local law enforcement agencies; (2) State and local elected officials; and (3) community organizations and civilians; and
- annually submit a list with a maximum of four recommended awardees to the Governor for final approval.

At the medal ceremony, each medal recipient must receive (1) a gold medallion bearing the State seal; (2) a certificate of commendation signed by the Governor and the presiding officers of the General Assembly; and (3) a permanent Maryland Public Service Honor Roll listing housed at the State House.

In addition, the ceremony must annually honor and remember the sacrifices and contributions of the following workers who lost their lives in the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse of 2024: (1) Dorlian Ronial Castillo Cabrera; (2) Carlos Daniel Hernandez Estrella; (3) Alejandro Hernandez Fuentes; (4) Miguel Angel Luna Gonzalez; (5) Jose Mynor Lopez; and (6) Maynor Yasir Suazo-Sandoval.

When an officer is awarded a medal posthumously, the officer's next of kin may receive official recognition and commendation on the officer's behalf.

Current Law: While statute authorizes the Governor to issue service medals to officers and enlisted individuals in the organized militia of the State who have completed five years or more of continuous service, there are no statutory provisions relating to law enforcement public service medals.

The State House Trust is responsible for the restoration and preservation of the State House, as well as the landscaping and construction of Lawyer's Mall. The trust must disapprove or approve and supervise any proposed repair, improvement, or other change to the State House or to any other building within State Circle, any proposed landscaping of the grounds of those buildings, and any proposed improvement, nonemergency repair, or other change to Lawyers' Mall.

State/Local Expenditures:

Medal Production and Ceremony: Because no more than four medals may be awarded each year, assuming that the medals are not pure gold, the costs associated with the design, production, purchase, and presentation of the medals at the required ceremony – along with certificates of commendation – likely does not materially affect State finances. In addition, to the extent that grants, private sponsorships, and law enforcement foundation support provide any funding for this effort, the need for any State funding decreases.

Medal Review Committee: DPSCS can convene the medal review committee with existing resources. In addition, committee members representing State agencies can serve on the committee using existing resources.

Maryland Public Service Honor Roll: The Maryland State Archives (MSA) advises that any addition to the State House interior or its grounds is required to be directly related to the history of the State House or the history of Maryland. While the placement and maintenance of the permanent Maryland Public Service Honor Roll listing housed at the State House can likely be handled with existing resources, MSA advises that the display is a violation of the guidelines for the State House.

One-Grade Promotion for Award Recipients: While the one-grade promotion required under the bill for medal recipients likely does not materially affect State or local finances – largely because no more than four law enforcement officers statewide can be awarded the medal each year – it does affect the law enforcement promotion process for State and local law enforcement agencies. The law enforcement promotion process is a competitive process and bound by policy, directives, and collective bargaining. The one-grade promotion could violate collective bargaining agreements and also result in the officer moving from a non-exempt to an exempt classification, which would impact the officer's ability to earn overtime and ultimately affect the officer's pay. In addition, it is possible that a law enforcement agency may not have a position classification available at the time that the one-grade promotion must be granted as a result of the bill.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City; Calvert and Prince George’s counties; Maryland Municipal League; Alcohol, Tobacco, and Cannabis Commission; Governor’s Office; University System of Maryland; Maryland Department of Labor; Department of Natural Resources; Comptroller’s Office; Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; Department of State Police; Maryland Department of Transportation; Maryland State Archives; Department of Legislative Services

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