COUNTY COUNCIL

OF

TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND

2026 Legislative Session, Legislative Day No.: September 8, 2026

Bill No.: 1654

Expiration Date: November 12, 2026

Introduced by: Mr. Callahan, Ms. Haythe, Mr. Lesher, Ms. Mielke, Mr. Stepp

A BILL TO AMEND CHAPTER 182 (VOLUNTEER EMERGENCY SERVICES LONGEVITY AWARD PROGRAM) OF THE TALBOT COUNTY CODE FOR THE PURPOSES OF CLARIFYING THE DEFINITION OF "ACTIVE VOLUNTEER MEMBER" AND AMENDING CERTAIN PROVISIONS FOR CONSISTENCY THEREWITH, PROVIDING THAT QUALIFYING ACTIVE VOLUNTEER MEMBERS SHALL RECEIVE MONTHLY BENEFITS IN A MINIMUM AMOUNT OF $100 FOR LIFE, WITH THE ABILITY TO EARN ADDITIONAL MONTHLY BENEFITS, SUBJECT TO CERTAIN CONDITIONS, AND AMENDING CERTAIN PROVISIONS REGARDING RECORDS OF VOLUNTEER MEMBERS AND THE POINT SYSTEM FOR QUALIFYING FOR BENEFITS

By the Council: September 8, 2026

Introduced, read first time, ordered posted, and public hearing scheduled on Tuesday, October 13, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. in the Bradley Meeting Room, South Wing, Talbot County Courthouse, 11 North Washington Street, Easton, Maryland 21601.

By Order: Susan W. Moran
Susan W. Moran, Secretary

A BILL TO AMEND CHAPTER 182 (VOLUNTEER EMERGENCY SERVICES LONGEVITY AWARD PROGRAM) OF THE TALBOT COUNTY CODE FOR THE PURPOSES OF CLARIFYING THE DEFINITION OF "ACTIVE VOLUNTEER MEMBER" AND AMENDING CERTAIN PROVISIONS FOR CONSISTENCY THEREWITH, PROVIDING THAT QUALIFYING ACTIVE VOLUNTEER MEMBERS SHALL RECEIVE MONTHLY BENEFITS IN A MINIMUM AMOUNT OF $100 FOR LIFE, WITH THE ABILITY TO EARN ADDITIONAL MONTHLY BENEFITS, SUBJECT TO CERTAIN CONDITIONS, AND AMENDING CERTAIN PROVISIONS REGARDING RECORDS OF VOLUNTEER MEMBERS AND THE POINT SYSTEM FOR QUALIFYING FOR BENEFITS

SECTION ONE: BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL OF TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND that Chapter 182 (Volunteer Emergency Services Longevity Award Program) of the Talbot County Code shall be and is hereby amended as follows:

KEY

Boldface.....Heading or defined term

Underlining.....Added to law by Bill

~~Strikethrough~~.....Deleted from law by Bill

* * * .....Existing law unaffected

§ 182-0. Definitions.

As used in this chapter, the following definitions apply:

ACTIVE VOLUNTEER MEMBER — A person who has served as a member of a County volunteer fire department or company or ambulance corps or volunteer fire company receiving contributions from the County and who has accumulated a minimum of 50 points per calendar year, in accordance with the point system set forth in this chapter.

DIRECTOR — The Director of Emergency Services for Talbot County.

§ 182-1. Program established; eligibility.

A. There is hereby established a Volunteer Emergency Services Longevity Award Program for qualified active volunteer members ~~of the County volunteer fire departments or companies or ambulance corps or any volunteer fire company receiving contributions from the County~~.

B. Any ~~person who has served as a member of a County volunteer fire department or company or ambulance corps or volunteer fire company receiving contributions from the County~~ active volunteer member shall be eligible to receive benefits hereinafter set forth, provided that:

(1) The ~~person~~ active volunteer member is certified, in accordance with the provisions of this chapter, to have served as an active volunteer subsequent to January 1, 2002; provided, however, that a person in active service prior to January 1, 2002, shall receive credit for prior years of service as certified by the department for which said service was performed and approved by the Director.

(2) Any ~~person~~ active volunteer member who completes 25 years of certified service and has not attained the age of 62 shall be qualified. They will become eligible for monthly benefits upon reaching the age of 62, provided that they are certified as having performed qualified service for each of the 25 years of prior service claimed. After January 1, 2002, a person must accumulate the proper number of points needed to qualify. After a person is qualified and certified, failure to remain active or to maintain membership in a fire department or company or ambulance corps will not disqualify or otherwise affect any person from receiving benefits at the age of 62.

C. Paid members of the fire department or company or ambulance corps shall not be eligible to earn point credits for any time or activities for which they are otherwise compensated. No credit shall be given for volunteer service other than for service to Talbot County fire departments or companies or ambulance corps.

§ 182-2. Service benefits; administration; payment of benefits.

A. After March 30, 2002, any ~~person~~ active volunteer member who has reached the age of 62 and who has completed a minimum of 25 years of certified active volunteer service ~~with any County volunteer fire department or company or ambulance corps~~ shall receive monthly benefits in ~~the~~ a minimum amount of $100 per month for life ~~or in such an amount as set in the County budget~~.

B. After [effective date of the bill], any active volunteer member who is receiving the monthly benefits set forth in Subsection A and who has completed an additional five years of certified active volunteer service shall receive additional monthly benefits in a minimum amount of $50 per month for life. For every five additional years of certified active volunteer service the active volunteer member completes, such additional monthly benefits shall increase by a minimum amount of $50 per month for life, up to an additional minimum amount of $200 per month for life for 45 years or more of certified active volunteer service.

C. The County Council may increase the minimum amounts set forth in Subsections A and B of this section in the County budget without amending this section.

~~B.~~ D. The Director shall administer the program. Payments shall be administered by the Director of Finance and shall be made directly to the active volunteer member entitled to such benefits.

~~C.~~ E. Benefits shall be paid quarterly, with payments being made on or after the last day of each quarter.

§ 182-3. Disability and death benefits.

A. In the event that any active volunteer member becomes disabled during the course of service described in the applicable provisions of Md. Code Ann., Labor and Employment Art., Title 9, as amended from time to time, and such disability prevents ~~the volunteer~~ such member from pursuing their normal occupation and the disability is of a permanent nature as determined and certified by the State Workers' Compensation Commission, ~~the volunteer~~ such member is entitled to receive full service benefits as above described and any such benefits as they may be entitled to, regardless of their age or length of service. These benefits shall begin on the first day of the first month following the establishment of the determination of the permanent disability and shall remain in effect as long as the permanent disability exists. This subsection shall not be applicable to any volunteer not insured either by the County or any other department or company or ambulance corps workers' compensation insurance carrier.

B. In the event that any active volunteer member is fatally injured or dies as a result of performing the services described in the Labor and Employment Article, § 9-234, Annotated Code of Maryland, as amended from time to time, their spouse shall be entitled to full service benefits as above provided. These benefits shall commence on the first day of the first month after the death and shall terminate upon death or remarriage of the spouse.

C. In the event that a qualified volunteer fireman or member of the ambulance corps dies, a death benefit of $5,000 shall be payable to such person or entity as the deceased may have designated, in writing, to the Director prior to death. In the event that no designation was made, said amount shall be paid to the estate of the deceased. Claims shall be presented to the Director and shall be documented by a death certificate or such other evidence as the Director may require.

§ 182-4. Periodic adjustments.

Periodically, the Director and the Director of Finance shall review the benefits prescribed in this chapter, and such review may result in a recommendation to increase or decrease these benefits. Revised benefits, subject to approval of the County Council through the budget process, shall be effective on the first pay period in the new fiscal year.

§ 182-5. Records; certification of eligibility; appeals.

A. It is the responsibility of each participating volunteer fire department or company or ambulance corps to maintain detailed and accurate records for each volunteer member on forms prescribed by the Talbot County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association as approved by the Director and Director of Finance.

B. Beginning June 1, 2002, and each ~~June 30~~ April 1 thereafter, the Board of Directors of each volunteer fire department or company or ambulance corps shall furnish the Director with a statement under oath certifying all volunteer members of the department or corps who have

qualified for credit for the previous years. Each statement shall contain all members' ages and previous credits earned and other information as shall be required by the Director, the Director of Finance, or the County Manager.

C. Upon receipt of this statement, the Director shall review the list of each department or corps. After the Director approves the certified list, he shall forward a copy of each approved list to the respective fire department or company or ambulance corps by ~~August~~ June 1 of each year. These lists shall be posted in a conspicuous place within each fire department or company or ambulance corps building for a period of not less than 30 calendar days. The posting date and the date of expiration of the 60 calendar days for a right of appeal shall be noted on all approved lists.

D. A person whose name does not appear on the certified list or who is denied credit for services prior to January 1, 2002, has the right of appeal within 60 calendar days of the posting.

E. The request for an appeal hearing shall be in writing and addressed to the Director, who shall make the final decision. The Director shall conduct the hearing within 60 calendar days after the posting expires but not less than 10 calendar days after notifying the appellant of the date.

F. Fifteen calendar days after all appeal hearings, if necessary, but no later than January 1, the Director shall submit to the Director of Finance of the County a statement under oath, certifying all volunteers of the fire department or company or ambulance corps who have qualified during the current year and those eligible for benefits under this chapter on forms prescribed by the County.

G. It shall be the responsibility of the Director to submit a statement under oath of any benefits to be paid, including prompt notification of termination.

H. ~~Any volunteer eligible for benefits under this chapter may elect to receive the benefits; however, if they are receiving benefits, they shall not be eligible to receive any other volunteer service benefits offered by another jurisdiction without withdrawing from the County's program. No person shall be ineligible as a result of receiving benefits from any fire department or company or ambulance corps within Talbot County.~~

~~I.~~ The burden shall be upon the eligible volunteer to make a claim for benefits, and no benefits shall be paid for which a claim is not made within 12 months of eligibility for said payment.

~~J.~~ I. A decision by the Director to deny benefits may be appealed to a committee consisting of the County Personnel Director, County Finance Director and County Manager. The appeal committee shall hold a hearing and receive evidence in the presence of the appellant prior to rendering a decision.

§ 182-6. Point system.

In order to qualify for the benefits pursuant to this chapter, points shall be credited to each volunteer in accordance with the following standards:

A. One point shall be credited for every three hours of attendance in a recognized County-approved training course, provided that not more than 20 points may be credited for all training courses attended per year.

B. One point shall be credited for each company or County drill attended in its entirety, provided that not more than 25 points may be credited for all drills attended per year.

C. One point shall be credited for each official company or County meeting pertaining to the County fire services or rescue services attended, provided that not more than 15 points may be credited for all meetings attended per year.

D. One point shall be credited for each call to which a volunteer responds, provided that not more than 40 of the required points may be credited for all calls responded to per year.

E. Twenty-Five points shall be credited for completion of a one-year term as an appointed or elected officer in any of the fire or rescue service organizations of the County, or the Volunteer Firemen's Association, provided that not more than one office shall be counted in any calendar year.

F. One point shall be credited for every three hours of acceptable collateral duties, approved by the Director, such as, but not limited to, apparatus and building maintenance, official standby and fire prevention or fund-raising details, provided that not more than 20 points may be credited for all collateral duties performed per year.

G. A volunteer member who serves or has served full-time military service in the Armed Forces of the United States shall receive credit at the rate of five points for each month served, provided that not more than 50 points can be credited for the calendar year. A maximum of two years of creditable service may be acquired in this manner.

H. A person shall be eligible to earn points only while said person is a resident of Talbot County. A person need not be a Talbot County resident to receive benefit payments.

§ 182-7. Effect of prior service.

A. In order to provide credit for service prior to January 1, 2002, the fire department or company or ambulance corps shall review its past and present membership rosters to determine the number of years of credit to which each member or past member is entitled. In making this analysis, the standards for active service shall be used as guidelines. Approval for service shall be certified by the Board of Directors of each fire department or company or ambulance corps and shall be subject to final review and approval by the Director. If a volunteer member has service in more than one County fire department or company or ambulance corps in Talbot County, that person shall receive credit for the service in each organization, provided that not more than one year's credits may be granted for each calendar year of volunteer service.

B. In the event that sufficient records are unavailable to prove service prior to January 1, 2002, the certification may be made by a fire department or company or ambulance corps after thorough investigation based on the best information, knowledge and belief of the Board of Directors of the respective fire department or company or ambulance corps, subject to the review and approval of the Director.

§ 182-8. Funding of program.

A. The Volunteer Emergency Service Longevity Award Program pension benefits program shall be funded as may from time to time be provided in the Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance of the County Council.

B. In lieu of direct funding, the County Council may from time to time purchase a benefits program from an insurance or annuity company, financial institution or other private vendor to provide some or all of the benefits described above.

§ 182-9. Fund established.

There is hereby created a Volunteer Emergency Services Longevity Award Fund, which may accrue interest and shall continue from year to year.

* * *

SECTION TWO: AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, that if any provision of this Bill or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held invalid for any reason in a court of competent jurisdiction, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or any other application of this Bill which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application, and for this purpose the provisions of this Bill are declared severable.

SECTION THREE: AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, that the Publishers of the Talbot County Code and the Talbot County Office of Law, in consultation with and subject to the approval of the County Manager, may make non-substantive corrections to codification, style, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, spelling, and any internal or external reference or citation included in this Bill, as finally adopted, that are incorrect or obsolete, with no further action required by the County Council. All such corrections shall be adequately referenced and described in an editor's note following the section affected.

SECTION FOUR: AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, that this Bill shall take effect sixty (60) days from the date of its passage.

PUBLIC HEARING

Having been posted and Notice of time, date, and place of hearing, and Title of Bill No. 1654 having been published, a public hearing was held on Tuesday, October 27, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. in the Bradley Meeting Room, South Wing, Talbot County Courthouse, 11 North Washington Street, Easton, Maryland 21601.

BY THE COUNCIL

Read the third time.

ENACTED: **October 27, 2026**

By Order Susan W. Moran
Susan W. Moran, Secretary

Callahan	-	Aye
Stepp	-	Aye
Lesher	-	Aye
Mielke	-	Aye
Haythe	-	Aye

EFFECTIVE DATE: **December 26, 2026**