



BARRY GLASSMAN

HARFORD COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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For more information, contact:

Cindy Mumby

Director of Governmental & Community Relations

410-340-5376

camumby@harfordcountymd.gov

Harford County Pays Down Student Loans for 66 First Responders; NEXT GEN Responder Program Helps Recruit, Retain Fire & EMS Volunteers

BEL AIR, Md., (Dec. 1, 2021) - Sixty-six first responders received help last week from Harford County government to pay down their student loans. This is the first set of student loan repayments up to \$5,000 per year in Harford's NEXT GEN Responder Program for volunteer fire company members.

Harford County relies entirely on volunteers for its fire service and has a combination of volunteer and paid EMS providers operating in 12 volunteer fire companies countywide.

"I've volunteered a lot of hours over the past 14 years," Joe Gamatoria, a member of the Havre de Grace Ambulance Corps, said. "The large amount of student loan relief has helped me pay down my college debt. This program will be a great tool for recruitment and retention of the volunteer fire and EMS service as well as contribute toward the education of future leadership with the organization."


Harford's NEXT GEN Responder Program was created by County Executive Barry Glassman, a former EMT with the Level Volunteer Fire Company, to recruit and retain public safety volunteers. The program is believed to be the first of its kind in Maryland.

"In addition to working paid jobs or going to school, our volunteer fire & EMS responders face increasingly rigorous training standards and give countless hours to save lives in our community," County Executive Glassman said. "We are proud to ease the burden of student loan debt on 66 of our volunteers to strengthen their ranks and show support for our local heroes."

Anyone with student loans, including recent graduates and college students majoring in any field of study, is eligible for the program. To qualify, they must be a volunteer member of a Harford County volunteer fire or ambulance company and earn 50 points in the LOSAP - Length of Service Award Program - for qualifying service activities in the 12 months beginning on October 1 each year. Payments of up to \$5,000 per year, up to a maximum of \$20,000 over four years, will be made directly to the student loan issuer.

Qualifications and applications are online at <https://www.harfordcountymd.gov/2976/NEXT-GEN-Responders-Student-Loan-Relief>.

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