



February 2026
Chief Michael Robinson
Monthly Report to ESAC

Attached herein is my report for February 2026. Please review and I will provide some highlights at tonight's meeting.

ESAC/Commissioner's Meeting: I want to commend Chairman Rick Baker for the professional demeanor and outstanding presentation last week (2/12) before the Board of Commissioners. The presentation was insightful and although it had a lot of information, I believe it was well received. As we enter the Fy-27 budget process, I am certain that we will be revisiting many of the areas that were presented. Having this presentation sets the tone and lays the foundation for our Fy-27 priorities and beyond. This has been a collaborative process among all of the ESAC membership, and I wish to thank each of you for your efforts. Since we are recognizing Rick Baker, I also want to extend to him a **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!** Which he celebrated yesterday! Revealing his age is "optional!"

Winter Storm Fern: Had a significant impact on our region over the last weekend in January. We coordinated the role of DFEMS along with other county agencies and held a planning meeting with all 14 Chiefs or their representatives. The storm had a significant impact on Carroll County and we upstaffed several stations with additional career personnel as well as National Guard assets. Each company "stepped up" with shelter, feeding, logistics and staffing over the three significant days of the storm. The response and coordination was EXCELLENT and all elements of our system worked great together. Our stations also supported our troops, law enforcement and Public Works and EM personnel. My sincere thanks to all involved. This was a federal, state and local declaration which could mean some reimbursement/funding, but it is doubtful. We are prepared and requested documentation from each company. In any case this was a great example of how we do work together in times of need. Fortunately call volume was low but we were certainly prepared! THANKS TO ALL!

STAFFING: We were nearing our authorized strength of 224 field personnel and hired 3 personnel on 1/15/26. We have had 2 additional employees who left DFEMS in January. This leaves us with 9 current vacancies or a total of 215 field personnel. We are currently processing for these positions and will fill them in early March.

Please welcome Christopher Evans to our administrative staff as our new Fire Protection Specialist who also began on 1/15. Chris brings with him decades of experience in various fire prevention/inspection roles both with the federal and state governments as well as private industry. He has a strong fire service background and is going through some learning and orientation to our plans review system. We were able to bring back our retired Fire protection

specialist-Bryan Van Fossen for several days of orientation and training. Once he gets settled into his position, I will ask Chris to attend a future meeting and do a brief presentation on his position and what he actually does to support our prevention and new construction efforts.

ALS Units: All 16 units remain staffed at the ALS level with some exceptions when staffing does not allow. When that occurs an EMS supervisor or the nearest ALS medic will upgrade the BLS unit based on location. Our remaining positions are either paramedics or FF/Paramedics so we should soon have floaters that will limit that occurrence. We currently have some additional ALS personnel that are completing their field precepting and should be released within the next several weeks.

EMS Fleet:

We recently placed the new M-139 in service. This is a Ford F-550/Horton ambulance, and we were able to replace the wrecked unit within 3 months of the accident. We also recently placed the new M-128 in service and that unit is a 2025 Ford F-550/Road Rescue. Both units will be an asset and lessen the strain on our overall fleet. Thanks to both Gamber and Sykesville for their assistance in getting things moved around and facilitating these new units. Both of these units have been “down” several times for some warranty work which is typical for new units and their level of complexity.

The situation overall is still not good, and we will be developing a plan to address this. In the interim we will work closely with you and your vendors and our maintenance shop to address issues as they occur. We are also addressing this in the FY-27 budget and will request at least five additional replacement medic units which could all be demos v. custom designed. Those units if available would give us a significantly shorter delivery time. It may take two years and 10 units to put us where we need to be. We also have an additional Tahoe on order and an F-150 for the BC/Shift commander. We hope to have both in service by the summer. We currently have multiple SUV/vehicles down for service issues and have not had enough reserve units available. This has put Chief Supko without a response capability for the last two days.

FY-27 Budget:

We are in the preliminary stages of the Fy 27 budget and placed our requests for additional staffing as elaborated in the ESAC presentation. Our priorities remain as follows:

1. Four (4) shift safety/training lieutenants-new positions
 2. Additional 8 (eight) floater positions from original FY-23 staffing plan
 3. Laborer either full or part-time to be assigned to the Quartermaster/warehouse
 4. Paramedic position (grant funded) for mobile integrative health (MIH) program
- 14 total positions

The training/safety Lieutenants positions would be assigned to each of the 24/72 shifts and would focus on the training and compliance needs of each shift as well as the volunteers. They would have an immediate safety officer response profile and perform other duties such as accident/injury investigations, station and PPE inspections and provide driver training and

OSHA compliance. All other departments in the region currently have such a position. We are having a second meeting on these positions later in the week.

Two weeks ago, I met with our county budget analyst, Treasurer-Mary Carole and Joe Dennis, to go over the FY-27 CCVESA budget as well as the 14 individual company budgets. Joe Dennis and I met with 14 companies and went over each budget item by item prior to Joe's final submission. We have centralized some purchasing in areas such as IT and nozzles/appliances and done some streamlining to other items. An increase in the overall VFC budgets is submitted with a recommended increase of over \$654,000 which I am fundamentally in support of. This is also to meet the spirit of the MOUs between each company and the county government.

In addition, given the challenges with apparatus replacement and timing we are asking for increases to the maintenance budget line item. Just understand that this will now be subjected to the standard review and processes that all county agencies go through. An initial budget is like a "wish list" and subject to the process and procedures of the Department of Management and budget. A hearing should be held sometime in March and there will be an opportunity for public comments and to further validate our needs.

My other goal with the FY 27 budget is to request a countywide study by a consultant. That study would evaluate our current system and its capabilities to include both fire and EMS coverage, station locations, apparatus needs/type and staffing. We would use three criteria in the study and that would include ISO standards of coverage, NFPA -1201,1710 for coverage and CFAI (fire accreditation) standards of cover. I believe we all have our opinions but a third-party unbiased organization using national standards could provide a comprehensive overview of our strengths, weakness and recommendations for future Fire/EMS coverage and potential costs. This would also provide an analysis of apparatus and fleet needs both for procurement and maintenance as well as station locations and maintenance requirements to provide sustainability. We will see if we are able to have this included and will move forward from there. I sent to each of you separately a "sample" of two such studies from our region. These were done by two different consulting organizations for Baltimore County and Anne Arundel County. This will give you an opportunity to see the comprehensive nature of these studies. If the commissioners approve such a direction, then an RFP would be developed to define the "scope" of such a study.

Insurance is another ongoing concern in terms of cost and coverage. The 10K deductibles based on accident history are not sustainable and I am working with risk management and our insurer VFIS to see what options are there. We will also look at that issue in our budget discussions. Our challenge with the budget will be the growing state budget deficit and the unpredictability of state funding and revenues into the county. I want to thank Joe Dennis for his significant efforts in the budget process, and I believe that we are moving towards a more streamlined and equitable process to meet the needs of the 14 VFCs while serving the citizens with efficiency and cost effectiveness.

PSTC improvements/ Phase II: We are also submitting in our budget at the request of the training committee a replacement container/module for our burn facilities which have become worn giving the age. This current configuration of a burn facility was intended to be temporary pending phase II of the PSTC. Currently we have a priority project into the state for \$1.3 million to provide a remediation project for the PFAS and water delivery to the PSTC site. The new water line construction has begun, and progress is being made. There are further discussions ongoing among other agencies involved in the project which includes the planning department as well as DPW. We must evaluate the required remediation issues and determine the what/when/how of the overall project as well as the intended outcomes and compliance.

The state legislative delegation met with the commissioners and administration to discuss the prioritization of that project which if approved could move phase II of the PSTC forward. Currently you can see that our warehouse project is progressing and will hopefully be completed by early March. This will move our quartermaster/supply operation entirely to this rehabbed space and will significantly increase our storage capacity. Once we have a handle on the completion, we will be scheduling a “small scale” ribbon cutting/dedication and ESAC members will be invited as well. More to follow.

Cancer screening grant: I submitted on 1/15 through the state health department, a grant for \$85,500 for cancer screening for 228 uniformed career personnel. There is \$480,000 available for a one-time cancer screening. I was told by 2nd VP Mott that you have also submitted a separate grant to cover volunteer personnel. This would be done separately by a third-party cancer screening company. We have had several “follow up” questions from the state which I would say indicates we are still a viable candidate. Our goal would be to provide testing for all who receive physicals through a cancer screening company and to attempt to do this on an annual basis at no cost to personnel. Cancer screening is now mandated annually for all career personnel under the state law known as the “Jim Malone Act”. There is no difference in vulnerability between career and volunteer so I will always be including funding for everyone to be tested annually for cancer consistent to the national recommendations. This has been added to the FY-27 budget.

NERIS: As of 1/1/2026 our NERIS reporting is now active and NFIRS is no longer available. In nearly two months since implementation, we have had a few glitches and are monitoring each. Richard Koons along with Melissa are working daily to assure that everything is in place. We will be maintaining 14 FDIDs or the new NERIS identifiers and we will centralize our data while allow each of you the ability to utilize the associated modules. We are also continuing to work with Richard on assuring the preservation of legacy LOSAP data and have worked out a solution. Understand that there will be glitches with the system as is the case with any new technology. Together we will figure this out and move forward with hopefully a better data and reporting system. We are in contact with our vendor, and I held a recent meeting with their management to review their contractual commitments and specifically the preservation and delivery of archived legacy data. Anyone with specific issues that can not be handled by your station representative

may contact Melissa Long our NERIS lead at mstrong@carrollcountymd.gov Please try to resolve at the station level and if there is an issue then contact Melissa and she checks her mail multiple times each day. We have also removed DFEMS EMS supervisors, BC101 and the command chiefs (FD1, OPS100, EMS 100, Safety 100) and created a station 100 for separate reporting. So EMS cars will no longer be in your stations data as they will report within station 100. We are also working to resolve the issue with the NFIRS legacy data. Each company has received a request from Melissa for access, and this is required so we can respond to both attorney and insurance reporting requests. Each company should have received an email to that effect.

Commendations Board has met to review submissions for awards related to 2025 incidents, special recognitions and to make recommendations for the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce Awards. The awards event has been scheduled for Tuesday, April 7, 2026, at the Flood Zone in Union Bridge. Invitations should be sent in the next several weeks and all ESAC members are encouraged to attend this special event to celebrate our career and volunteer personnel and their outstanding accomplishments. Don't miss the opportunity to recognize some great people who have gone above/beyond!

Maryland General Assembly/Legislative Session-2026 began on 1/14/26 in Annapolis. This is a challenging year for the state given the billion+ deficit and their politicization of many national issues. I am also in attendance during the session for the Friday fire service legislative meetings along with your MSFA President and other fire service reps. Hopefully the fire service will make some progress and preserve state funding in areas such as 508, loan funding and other relevant initiatives. Each company should sign up for the weekly MSFA legislative bulletin to keep abreast of progress in these areas. I'm sure that President Simpson will have more to say in this area. There are a number of Fire service-related bills that are being opposed by the various organizations. Highlights include:

1. A bill to mandate quarterly ambulance inventory compliance by MIEMSS
2. A bill to allow medical marijuana use by career Fire/EMS personnel
3. A bill to mandate all jurisdictions to work a 168 hr./28-day cycle (our current schedule)
4. A bill mandating inspections of short-term rental properties
5. Many other bills with impact on the fire service

On the federal level the PSOB/line of duty criteria was recently revised to include multiple types of occupational cancer as now eligible for full recognition as a line of duty death. This will be retroactive to deaths starting in 2020. Some 20 types of cancer have been identified within this bill. This is a huge win for the fire service and those of us who have various types of occupational cancer. <https://www.police1.com/legal/bill-recognizing-occupational-cancer-as-a-line-of-duty-death-for-officers-heads-to-presidents-desk> for further information

Operations: Tim Legore will report and the January FROPS meeting was cancelled due to the weather. There is a proposal adopted by the Metro Fire Chiefs Safety Committee that would

require SCBA/PPE during all phases of overhaul to mitigate exposure to carcinogens. This would also apply to fire investigators (FMs) This is to address particulate matter in the aftermath of combustion that is linked to cancer. This will be a significant cultural shift, and we will be discussing DFEMS implementation of the proposal next week at the FROPS meeting. Given the impact of such a change this will be widely circulated and debated before any adoption. Fundamentally, DFEMS would be in favor of such a change, but we need to assess the impact on our air management and staffing requirements. More to follow.

I have a "DRAFT" this evening for initial discussion on a POV policy for incident response. The primary issue is when our personnel with issued portable radios respond in their private vehicles and are entered into our ECC/CAD system. This makes that person and their vehicle a component of DFEMS and the county. Our insurance does not cover this and there is an extreme liability on the county should an accident occur enroute or at an incident. Our SOP would allow POV response based on current company policy or a model policy that we would provide. However, members would not be on the air or be acknowledged until arriving on scene. If given a traffic violation during a POV response that would be reviewed by our accident review committee. Each company has one or more command vehicles for their officers to respond, and the liability of official non departmental vehicles cannot be assumed. This is a first draft so review and it will also be presented to FROPS next week.

Respectfully submitted,

Chief Michael W. Robinson

Michael W. Robinson MA, CFO, NRP
Director

MWR/mr

C: CCVESA officers
Command Staff