

February 2, 2022

Support of HB 293 – Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund

The Honorable Shane Pendergrass, Chair
Health and Government Operations Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 241
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Pendergrass, Vice-Chair Pena-Melnyk, and Members of Health and Government Operations Committee:

The staff and board of directors at [The Frederick Center](https://www.thefrederickcenter.org/), would like to thank Delegate Karen Lewis Young of Frederick County for bringing this critical legislation forward. The national mental health and suicide prevention hotline is essential in fighting the national epidemic our community and others have experienced, especially over the last few years.

Some key statistics underscore the need for a robust and fully operational 9-8-8 infrastructure. According to the 2018 Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey,

- 27% of heterosexual and 61% of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual (GLB) students felt hopeless for at least two consistent weeks within the last year.
- 14% of heterosexual and 44% of GLB students seriously considered suicide within the past year.
- 13% of heterosexual and 36% of GLB students made a plan to attempt suicide within the past year.

Combine these horrifying statistics with the increased levels of bullying, at-risk coping behaviors (smoking, drinking, drug use), and high-risk sexual behavior; LGBTQ+ people were in crisis before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the pandemic, like many other historically disenfranchised communities, the LGBTQ+ community has reported troubling increases in the above-listed behavior.

In addition to young people experiencing critically high mental and behavioral health issues, older LGBTQ+ people have also been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. According to a nationwide study conducted by the Movement Advancement Project,

The report illustrates that LGBTQ households are more likely than non-LGBTQ households to experience job losses, serious financial problems, issues accessing



322 W Patrick Street
Frederick, MD 21701
301-383-8787
thefrederickcenter.org
tfc@thefrederickcenter.org

healthcare, and increased challenges navigating at-home learning for their children as a result of the pandemic. These challenges are especially true for Black and Latinx people, as well as for LGBTQ people living in the South and the Midwest regions of the United States.

These new polling data reveal that LGBTQ people and their households, especially LGBTQ people of color and low-income LGBTQ people, are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic, pointing to the need for targeted assistance and explicit protections from discrimination as our country continues to address the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The fact is, Marylanders need every tool at their disposal to help create a culture of support and care for our most vulnerable populations struggling with their day-to-day lives. An unfunded or underfunded 9-8-8 program would lead to longer wait times and responders unaware of Maryland's unique challenges and resources. Studies are unequivocal; when people wait for hotlines, the drop rate increases dramatically.

We must do everything we can to ensure a safe and fully funded 9-8-8 hotline rollout. The safety and security of countless Marylanders, especially LGBTQ+ people, will rely on this support tool.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kris Fair". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kris Fair
Executive Director.