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Delegate Shane Pendergrass, Chair
Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair
Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Support-HB0293 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services-9-8-8 Trust Fund

Dear Delegate Pendergrass, Delegate Pena-Melnyk, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Brain Injury Association of Maryland in support of HB 0293. For the last 39 years, BIAMD has been the only statewide non-profit organization dedicated solely to providing free information and resource assistance to the brain injury community. Through its Toll-Free Brain injury Connection Center (1.800.221.6443), its website (www.biamd.org), and its social media presence, BIAMD has sought to educate, enlighten, and support the estimated 120,000 Maryland families currently living with the devastating effects of brain injury and the caregivers and professionals who support them. BIAMD regularly responds to over 300 phone calls a month from individuals living with brain injury, family members, and professionals seeking information and assistance. Brain injury can have lasting cognitive, physical, and emotional problems that increase the likelihood that a person living with a brain injury will need crisis services during their lifetime. Adequately resourcing crisis call centers with both financial and training resources will allow them to effectively assist Marylanders living with brain injury when they experience a behavioral health crisis.

The frontal lobe, which controls executive functions, decision making, impulse control and judgement, is the area that is most likely to be injured due to its location and structure of the skull. A history of brain injury increases the likelihood of a person developing mental health and substance use disorders. The combination of stressors, physical and psychological issues and impaired decision-making abilities increase the risk of attempting and completing suicide for Marylanders living with a brain injury. With these considerations we strongly recommend as part of the implementation of a fully funded National Suicide Prevention Hotline, the crisis center staff are trained to identify signs and symptoms of brain injuries and some simple, effective strategies to assist individuals living with a brain injury during a crisis.

The Brain Injury Association of Maryland supports the creation of the 9-8-8 Trust fund to strengthen the crisis call centers in alignment with state and federal priorities. We are willing to partner and resource for callers with a history of brain injury and crisis center staff to address the needs and expected influx of calls once the national suicide prevention lifeline is implemented in July 2022.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

Sincerely,
Catherine Rinehart Mello
Brain Injury Association of Maryland
443-364-9856