

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

Position: *Support*

Bill Summary

HB 293 establishes a nonlapsing trust fund to provide reimbursement costs associated with designating and maintaining 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number for the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline. The Maryland Department of Health will be responsible for reporting by December 1 each year on the expenditure of funds and any additional services provided by the funding.

MedStar Health's Position

On the recommendation from the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) study on the value of a three-digit number being designated to aid suicide and mental health prevention, Congress designated 988 as the new phone number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Set to go live July 1, 2022, all phone companies will route 988 calls to local crisis call centers that are part of the Lifeline Network. The local crisis call centers provide 24/7 free, confidential emotional support to people calling for help. It is expected that calls to the Lifeline will significantly increase when the new number goes live.

MedStar Health supports designating 988 as Maryland's phone number for suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis hotline and establishing a sustainable funding source to support existing behavioral health crisis call centers in Maryland through a small fee added to commercial mobile services providers. The three-digit number will more easily be remembered particularly during times of emotional distress. Those in crisis will be more likely to receive help from those most qualified to provide support. It will provide more effective triage to lessen the burden on emergency medical services, hospital emergency departments, and law enforcement so those agencies can direct their limited resources to the areas they are trained to serve. It also provides an opportunity for states to reimagine the provision of crisis services and to ensure adequate funding for mobile crisis services, crisis center hubs, and crisis stabilization services.

For the reasons listed above, we respectfully ask that you give HB 293 a *favorable* report.