



Government Affairs Office
12 West Street
Annapolis, MD 21401
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BILL NO. : House Bill 293

TITLE: Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund

COMMITTEES: House Health & Government Operations Committee
House Appropriations Committee

HEARING DATE: February 2, 2022

VERIZON'S POSITION: SUPPORT

PURPOSE OF BILL:

In October 2020, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act was signed into law at the federal level, whereby 9-8-8 was designated as the three-digit dialing code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (“Lifeline”). Furthermore, the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) mandated that telephone providers make this critical service available to their customers by July 16, 2022.

House Bill 293: Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9–8–8 Trust Fund (HB 293) compliments the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act. Under HB 293, a non-lapsing fund is created to assist the Maryland Department of Health in designating and maintaining 9–8–8 as the primary phone number for the State’s behavioral health crisis hotline which will be funded directly by federal investment passed through to the state. 9-8-8 will provide Marylanders from any jurisdiction within the State with easy access to crisis intervention services and crisis care coordination twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, once implemented.

COMMENTS:

Verizon **strongly supports** HB 293 in its current form which uses available Federal funding and state revenues without increasing costs to consumers where taxes and fees account for 27.5% of their existing phone service bill. In December 2021, Verizon announced that its customers could call Lifeline by dialing either 1-800-273-TALK or the new abbreviated code, 9-8-8. This announcement marked an important milestone in Verizon’s effort to make Lifeline’s critical resources available to anyone who needs assistance.

Verizon understands that technology and connectivity can provide many meaningful societal benefits and access to 9-8-8 mental health services is one shining example. Whether wireless or wireline customers can call, text, or chat through a simple to remember number such as 9-8-8 and instantly will be connected to personalized mental health services. Customers will no longer be alone as 9-8-8 will be, in essence, a digital bridge to trained counselors who are part of the existing Lifeline network. Lifeline’s knowledgeable counselors will attentively discern a caller’s problem, provide support, and connect them to additional resources if necessary.

This effort is an initiative that truly can save lives and make a difference to countless individuals and families. Verizon remains proud to do its part in supporting this critically important endeavor.

For these reasons, Verizon urges a **FAVORABLE COMMITTEE REPORT on HB 296.**

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:

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