



Maryland  
Hospital Association

February 2, 2022

To: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair, House Health & Government Operations  
Committee

Re: Letter of Support- House Bill 293- Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust  
Fund

Dear Chair Pendergrass:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on House Bill 293. In 2020, Congress passed legislation designating 988 as the new telephone number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This legislation was largely in response to an increase of suicide attempts and suicide deaths in the United States.<sup>1</sup> In 2019, suicide was the 10th leading cause of death in the country.<sup>2</sup> That year, 47,511 deaths occurred because of suicide, and there were 1.3 million suicide attempts, according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. These statistics and other factors prompted behavioral health stakeholders in Maryland and the U.S. to advance legislation to reduce suicide deaths and overall behavioral health harm.

House Bill 293 designates 988 to be the phone number for Maryland's suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis hotline. In addition, the legislation establishes a dedicated fund to support existing behavioral health crisis call centers. Once enacted, 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.

The 9-8-8 Trust Fund establishes a state fund to invest in 24/7 call centers, related crisis response services, and mobile crisis teams. Currently, hospital emergency departments are often the only available provider for a person experiencing a behavioral health crisis. Establishing a dedicated fund to ensure community providers of crisis services are properly resourced will allow the full spectrum of crisis services to flourish and help ensure patients can access the level of care appropriate for their condition.

For these reasons we urge a favorable report of HB 293.

For more information, please contact:

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<sup>1</sup> American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (2021, September 9). *Suicide Statistics*. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Retrieved January 27, 2022, from <https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/>

<sup>2</sup> American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (2021, September 9). *Suicide Statistics*. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Retrieved January 27, 2022, from <https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/>