



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 02, 2022

HB 293

Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9–8–8 Trust Fund

House Health and Government Operations Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference (“Conference”) represents the public policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch) dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.

House Bill 293 establishes the 9–8–8 Trust Fund as a special, non-lapsing fund; requiring interest earnings of the Fund to be credited to the Fund; requiring the Maryland Department of Health to designate 9–8–8 as the primary phone number for the State’s behavioral health crisis hotline; requiring the Department to work to promote public messaging relating to 9–8–8 services in a certain manner; and generally relating to behavioral health crisis response services and the 9–8–8 hotline.

Behavioral health issues, including depression and suicide, are public health challenges that causes immeasurable pain among individuals, families, and communities across the country. This is an urgent issue that the Maryland General Assembly and citizens of Maryland must address. House Bill 293 is an important step for Maryland to meet the needs of individuals facing a serious behavioral health crisis.

Those experiencing mental illness are among the most marginalized and underserved in our society. The Catholic Church through its parishes, charities and other ministries reaches out pastorally to those struggling with mental illness. Because the Catholic faith embraces an integrated view of the human person as both corporeal and spiritual, we welcome the sciences as one pathway to knowledge of the human person. Pope St. John Paul II said *"Whoever suffers from mental illness always bears God's image and likeness in themselves, as does every human being. In addition, they always have the inalienable right not only to be considered as an image of God and therefore as a person, but also to be treated as such."*

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 293.