



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

February 2, 2022

Delegate Shane Pendergrass
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
Taylor House Office Building, Room 241
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis MD 21401-1912

Dear Chair Pendergrass and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee:

As a retired service woman with thirty years' service and a combat veteran, I am writing in support of **House Bill 293 "Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services -- 9-8-8 Trust Fund"** which requires the Maryland Department of Health to designate 9-8-8 as the primary phone number for the State's behavioral health crisis hotline as part of a *statewide initiative* for the coordination and delivery of *the continuum of behavioral health crisis response services* in the State. In addition to crisis call centers, this bill establishes mobile crisis team services and crisis stabilization centers -- something that would have been helpful to McGruder students when a shooting occurred in their school.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), Maryland lost 657 souls to suicide last year (10.3 per 100,000). [Suitt](#), found that suicide rates among the United States public have been increasing for the past twenty years, but among active-duty personnel and veterans of the post-9/11 wars, the suicide rate is even higher, outpacing average Americans. Four times as many active-duty personnel and war veterans of post-9/11 conflicts have died of suicide than in combat. The report finds that these high suicide rates are caused by multiple factors, including risks inherent to fighting in any war such as high exposure to trauma, stress, the "military" culture, and training, continued access to guns, and the difficulty of reintegrating into civilian life.

Currently, a veteran trying to reach a crisis line must call a 10-digit number (1-800-273-8255), then press 1. Shifting to 9-8-8 would make seeking care easier. We know that the public has bought into the standard 9-1-1 emergency number. Now we need a standard national crisis line number and Maryland needs additional services to meet the mental health needs of our citizens.

The Maryland Military Coalition, a voluntary, non-partisan organization representing 18 veteran service organizations who serve over 150,000 service men and women throughout our State. The Maryland Military Coalition strongly supports and urgently asks for a **FAVORABLE** report on House Bill 293. We applaud Delegates K. Young, Belcastro, Charkoudian, Forbes, Healey, Kaiser, Kerr, McComas, Reznik, and Ruth for their continued commitment to mental health and the veteran community.

Yours, respectfully

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Member Organizations, Maryland Military Coalition

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