



## Montgomery County Mental Health Advisory Committee

February 7, 2023

Written Support of HB0271

Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk  
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee  
Maryland House of Delegates  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Committee Members,

The Montgomery County Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC), with the support of the Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council (AODAAC) is writing in support of HB0271 "9-8-8- Trust Fund – Funding." This is a cross-file of SB0003 which already passed the Senate.

MHAC was established to advise the Montgomery County Executive and the County Council on matters concerning mental health. Our work includes providing citizen oversight to all state-funded mental health agencies serving Montgomery County and serving as an advocate for a comprehensive mental health system for persons of all ages. The Committee helps to ensure that publicly-funded mental health services are responsive to local needs, accountable to the citizenry and accessible to those in need.

In 2022, MHAC established a subcommittee to explore opportunities to improve and expand access to mental health services. The 9-8-8 lifeline is a critical resource for both types of services. We want to share three key findings in our subcommittee work that pertains directly to Montgomery County mental health service needs related to 9-8-8:

- **The 988 lifeline supports crisis and prevention** – 9-8-8 is a ground-breaking free resource that not only serves individuals in crisis but also provides a prevention component by connecting individuals with other important intervention, treatment and stabilization/recovery resources.
- **A positive experience is critical for this community** – Historically, individuals with mental health and substance use disorders have a distrust of systems which have failed them. Their "first impression" of behavioral health services - which will often be 9-8-8 - could be life-saving and also influence their willingness to continue engagement with other services and resources.
- **Health equity component** – Montgomery County is a majority-minority county and 9-8-8 provides a more trusted approach for underserved communities. While there are accommodations for non-English speaking residents, MHAC looks forward to 9-8-8 funding which can allow services to expand and meet the growing need for equitable access, regardless of the resident's native language.

Behavioral Health and Crisis Services • Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Services

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[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhs](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhs)

Dr. John Palmieri, Acting Director for 988 at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) describes the building of the 988 and crisis continuum as a “marathon not a sprint.” Funding for 988 ensures that Maryland continues this transformative model for mental health services and that the dedicated hotline staff have the training, resources, and compensation they deserve.

We strongly urge you to issue a favorable report for this bill and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Kerin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Susan" and last name "Kerin" clearly legible.

Susan Kerin, Mental Health Advisory Committee Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laura Mitchell". The signature is cursive and elegant, with the first name "Laura" and last name "Mitchell" clearly legible.

Laura Mitchell, Alcohol and Other Drug  
Abuse Advisory Council Chair