



Maryland Chapter

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF
EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS

TO: The Honorable Joseline A. Pena Melnyk, Chair
Members, House Health and Government Operations Committee
The Honorable Ariana B. Kelly

FROM: Danna L. Kauffman
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DATE: February 7, 2023

RE: **SUPPORT** – House Bill 271 – *9-8-8 Trust Fund – Funding*

The Maryland Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians (MDACEP), which represents the interests of emergency physicians and their patients throughout the State of Maryland, **supports** House Bill 271. This bill requires the Governor to provide a mandatory appropriation of \$12 million for the operation of the 9-8-8 Trust Fund. During the 2022 Session, the General Assembly passed, and the State enacted the 9-8-8 Trust Fund for the purpose of: (1) designating and maintaining 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline; and (2) developing and implementing a Statewide initiative for the coordination and delivery of the continuum of behavioral health crisis response services in the State.

In 2020, the federal government implemented the National Suicide Designation Act of 2020, which established 9-8-8 as a universal number for mental health crises and suicide prevention. In July 2022, 9-8-8 went live. All phone companies now route 9-8-8 calls to local crisis call centers that are part of the Lifeline network. The local crisis call centers provide 24/7 free, confidential, and emotional support to individuals calling for help. As the public learns of the presence and services of 9-8-8, it is expected that calls to the Lifeline will continue to significantly increase. The need for 9-8-8 and the access to a continuum of crisis services is greater than ever, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide has become a leading cause of death in the United States, with the rate the highest in ages 10-34 years old. Maryland needs to ensure that its existing eight local call centers are adequately resourced to support this influx of calls for help.

It is important to recognize that the services provided by 9-8-8 are not static but benefit other health care settings. Maryland emergency departments continue to be inundated with patients experiencing a mental health crisis. Too often, these patients, especially pediatric and geriatric patients, wait hours, days, or weeks in the emergency departments waiting for community-based services. Not only is this detrimental to the health of the patient, but it also limits capacity for individuals more appropriately cared for in the emergency department, such as stroke, heart attack, and car accidents.

House Bill 271 ensures that the 9-8-8 Trust Fund has the appropriate and necessary resources to operate effectively and efficiently. MDACEP urges a favorable vote.