

Senate Bill 445
Maryland Department of Health – 2-1-1 Maryland – Oversight
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 8, 2024

Position: SUPPORT

Senate Bill 445 aims to strengthen the coordination between the 2-1-1 Maryland and state agencies, including the Department of Health, and generally clarifies the coordination of efforts for the program.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders is at risk of food insecurity. A person who is food insecure does not have consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day, and this problem persists in every area of the state. There are also communities and populations that are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, including communities of color, families with children, and older adults. The drivers of food insecurity are complex and often include additional factors such as low income, lack of reliable transportation, and access to healthcare.

The Maryland Food Bank is very supportive of the 2-1-1 program, its reach across the state, and the impact it has on the lives of many Marylanders, including those who are facing food insecurity. Our partnership with 2-1-1 includes responsiveness to callers who are needing access to food resources; though, because of the breadth of services and connections 2-1-1 is able to sustain, its work in its entirety helps support families and indeed entire communities address circumstances hindered by a lack of adequate resources. 2-1-1 connects the Maryland Food Bank to Marylanders in need of food delivered to their home, playing a role in the over 25,000 prepacked Back Up Boxes totaling over 750,000 pounds of food we distributed in this way in FY 23.

Any clarification in the law and additional increased coordination between state agencies that will make 2-1-1 stronger will prove beneficial for Marylanders all across the state. 2-1-1 is a trusted resource and considered a lifeline for many, due especially its wide availability for help and its integration into the many different services a caller might need assistance or referrals with. The Maryland Food Bank contends that that there are root causes of hunger and drivers of hardship that lead 1 in 3 Marylanders to be at risk for food insecurity, and ensuring that *all* of those needs are met is the only way food security will be achieved statewide. 2-1-1 is emblematic of this mission.

For these reasons, the Maryland Food Bank respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 445.