



January 15, 2025

**Senate Budget & Tax Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

SB 36 – Public Safety - 9-1-1 Trust Fund - 9-8-8 Suicide Prevention Hotline

Behavioral Health System Baltimore, Inc. (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment, crisis response, and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports SB36 – Public Safety - 9-1-1 Trust Fund - 9-8-8 Suicide Prevention Hotline. SB36 will allow the Maryland 911 Board to have more flexibility to invest funding in systems that better coordinate 911 with the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Removing the strict prohibition that is currently in law on the use of funds for only 911 costs will allow more options to build a stronger emergency management along with a stronger behavioral health crisis response system.

The 911 Trust Fund and the Maryland 911 Board play integral roles in investing in Maryland’s 911 emergency management system. Each year, recommendations are made on to how to use the funding available in the 911 Trust Fund both for operations and to upgrade the system. Since the launch of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in 2022, there has been an interest in better coordinating the services that each resource provides, but strict language in the authorizing statute of the 911 Trust Fund has prevented funding from being used for such purposes. This bill removes that restriction while still maintaining a focused purpose for the 911 Trust Fund to be used to support the 911 system.

Investments in technology and trainings to improve coordination between 911 and 988 will pay dividends for Marylanders. 911 and 988 provide different but related emergency response services. The purpose of 911 is to determine what resources to dispatch as quickly as possible. 988, on the other hand, primarily provides emergency emotional support and can take the time needed to support someone experiencing a behavioral health crisis. Call takers need to be able to transfer calls as appropriate and coordinate the dispatching of behavioral health resources with the dispatch of traditional emergency response services. Baltimore has seen promising results from its [Behavioral Health 911 Diversion Pilot](#) where 911 professionals transfer appropriate mental health calls to 988, and the state should seek to facilitate similar coordination in other jurisdictions. This bill will simply allow the Maryland 911 Board to have the option to fund efforts to improve coordination between 911 and 988 when they deem it necessary and appropriate.

The state should seek to strengthen coordination between 911 and 988 and this bill will help those efforts tremendously. **BHSB urges the Senate Budget & Tax Committee to pass SB36.**

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