

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2004 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

House Bill 981

(Delegate Hurson, *et al.*)

Health and Government Operations

Finance

Health and Human Services Referral System

This bill establishes a Health and Human Services Referral Board within the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) staffed by the Maryland State Association of United Ways. The board will oversee four self-funded pilot programs established before October 1, 2004 by a task force designated by the Public Service Commission that includes the Maryland State Association of United Ways, the United Way of Central Maryland, the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems, and local health and human services organizations. The pilot programs include: Community Crisis Services, Inc.; United Way of Central Maryland – First Call for Help; Mental Health Association of Frederick County; and Life Crisis Center, Inc. The board also must determine: how to implement the “health and human services referral system” (2-1-1 telephone service) statewide; how to integrate emergency and nonemergency numbers; and funding options for the referral system. The bill also establishes 2-1-1 as the primary information and referral telephone number for health and human services in Maryland. Funding for the board is subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

By December 31, 2005, and every year afterward, the board must report to the Governor and the General Assembly on its activities.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill would not materially affect governmental operations or finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: 9-1-1 is the emergency telephone number in the State which takes calls to direct requests for police, fire fighting, and emergency ambulance services.

Background: DHMH's Community Health Administration currently provides \$100,000 annually to the United Way to develop a 2-1-1 call system. The pilot program would use the 2-1-1 call system to direct calls to the four nonprofit organizations' hotlines, which are already in existence. The hotlines receive approximately 180,000 calls annually for information and referrals for health and human services programs. Twelve Maryland jurisdictions (approximately 3.8 million people) would be part of the pilot program. Those jurisdictions are: Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, Howard, Frederick, Prince George's, Dorchester, Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset counties.

Twenty-five states have established a statewide 2-1-1 system. In Maryland, there are more than 500 "1-800" numbers encompassing 135 information and referral centers. Maryland's Public Service Commission has approved 2-1-1 as a statewide pilot program.

The Calling for 2-1-1 Act of 2003 is pending in the U.S. Senate. The bill directs the U.S. Secretary of Commerce to award each state a grant to establish a 2-1-1 call system for health and human services referrals and information. In order to receive a grant, each state must establish a lead entity to carry out these activities. How much each state would receive is not specified. However, the bill calls for authorizing a \$200 million appropriation in federal fiscal 2004.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Human Resources, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 4, 2004
l/jr Revised - House Third Reader - March 29, 2004

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