

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader

House Bill 421

(Delegate S. Johnson, *et al.*)

Health and Government Operations

Budget and Taxation

Public Safety - 9-1-1 Trust Fund - 9-8-8 Suicide Prevention Hotline

This bill expands the purpose of the 9-1-1 Trust Fund to include providing funds for costs related to the operation of the 9-8-8 suicide prevention hotline that may be shared with 9-1-1 activities, including software interfaces and joint training. The bill also repeals the prohibition that prevents the 9-1-1 Trust Fund from being utilized for *any purpose* associated with the 9-8-8 suicide prevention hotline and, instead, prohibits the 9-1-1 Trust Fund from being utilized for any costs that *solely support* the 9-8-8 suicide prevention hotline.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Special fund expenditures for the 9-1-1 Trust Fund increase, likely minimally, as additional activities and projects are funded; however, the bill is anticipated to result in administrative efficiencies and may decrease special fund expenditures for the 9-8-8 Trust Fund, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law:

9-1-1 Trust Fund and Fee Revenues

The 9-1-1 Trust Fund is managed by the Maryland 9-1-1 Board within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) and funded through a State 9-1-1 fee

and county 9-1-1 fee. Telephone companies, wireless carriers, and other 9-1-1 accessible service providers collect and remit the fees monthly to the Comptroller for deposit into the fund.

The State 9-1-1 fee is distributed to counties at the discretion of the Maryland 9-1-1 Board in response to county 9-1-1 system enhancement requests. The county fee, the prepaid wireless 9-1-1 fee remittances, and any investment earnings of the fund are all distributed quarterly to each county in prorated amounts according to the level of fees collected in each jurisdiction. Among other things, the purpose of the 9-1-1 Trust Fund is to fund the operation and maintenance of 9-1-1 systems, public safety answering point facilities costs, costs for public education materials, costs to maintain the cybersecurity of 9-1-1 systems, and training costs for specified personnel.

Directly related to the bill, the 9-1-1 Trust Fund may not be used to pay for *any purpose* associated with the 9-8-8 suicide prevention hotline.

9-8-8 Trust Fund and Fee Revenues

Under Chapters 145 and 146 of 2022 and the federal National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020, the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) designated 9-8-8 as the State's behavioral health crisis hotline on July 16, 2022. The chapters also established the 9-8-8 Trust Fund as a special, nonlapsing fund to provide reimbursement for costs associated with designating and maintaining 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline and developing and implementing a statewide initiative for the coordination and delivery of the continuum of behavioral health crisis response services. MDH administers the fund.

Chapters 780 and 781 of 2024 established a State 9-8-8 fee with a structure and application nearly identical to the structure and application of the State's 9-1-1 fee. The 9-8-8 fee is set at \$0.25 and applied on specified 9-8-8 accessible services in Maryland (including on phoneline subscribers beginning October 1, 2024, and prepaid wireless purchasers beginning July 1, 2027). Notably, for the 9-1-1 fee, a telephone company may retain 0.5% of the 9-1-1 fees it collects to cover specified administrative expenses; however, a telephone company may not retain any portion of the 9-8-8 fee.

State Expenditures: Under current law, any training or technological upgrades that would benefit both the 9-1-1 and 9-8-8 systems would have to be procured separately to ensure 9-1-1 funds are not spent for the benefit the 9-8-8 system. By allowing 9-1-1 Trust Fund monies to be used on projects that benefit both systems, the bill allows collaboration between the systems and removes any potential duplication of effort.

Therefore, while the bill increases special fund expenditures from the 9-1-1 Trust Fund as additional activities and projects are funded, the bill is anticipated to result in, at the very least, administrative efficiencies for both systems and may decrease expenditures from the 9-8-8 Trust Fund. Nevertheless, MDEM advises that any increase in expenditures from the 9-1-1 Trust Fund is anticipated to be minimal and not affect the solvency of the fund. In the long-term, the efficiencies made possible by the bill may decrease expenditures for both trust funds.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: SB 36 (Senators Kagan and Augustine) - Budget and Taxation.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Emergency Management; Comptroller's Office; Maryland Department of Health; Maryland Association of Counties; Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, Queen Anne's, and St. Mary's counties; Department of Legislative Services

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