

**Senate Bill 719 Maryland Department of Health – 2-1-1 Maryland – Mental Health
Services Phone Call Program**

Finance Committee

March 3, 2021

Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 719.

SB 719 would require the Maryland Department of Health to work with Maryland 2-1-1 to establish a program where individuals can opt-in to receive periodic mental health check-in calls and connect individuals to services where appropriate.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted mental health in Maryland. Calls to the Baltimore crisis hotline, Here2Help, doubled between April and July 2020. As of September, the number of callers threatening suicide was five times higher than at the beginning of the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, rates of Marylanders experiencing anxiety or depression ranged from 25-40%.¹

Similar smaller-scale programs exist throughout Maryland for specific populations. The American Legion has utilized “Buddy Checks” through COVID-19 to assist veterans with mental health, Frederick County’s Mental Health Association has Reassurance Calls to senior citizens, and Baltimore Neighbors Network provides emotional support calls to Baltimore’s most vulnerable residents.

In establishing a state-wide program through the Maryland Department of Health and Maryland 2-1-1, Maryland can provide critical resources to residents who may not receive services through existing programs. For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 719 and urges a favorable report.

¹Baltimore Sun, (2020, September 29). *As coronavirus rolls on in Maryland, mental health toll surges, with experts fearing spike in suicides.* <https://www.baltimoresun.com/features/bs-hs-mental-health-covid-20200929-yzjfdfc2ijb4vab7o3v4g7q25a-story.html>