

March 1, 2021

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

Chair Kelley, Vice Feldman, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 45,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations and service providers. NAMI Maryland is dedicated to providing education, support and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

NAMI Maryland strongly supports SB 719, legislation that would establish an opt-in program to help provide support and connection to services using the 2-1-1 system in Maryland.

Nationwide, the increase to mental health call and text centers offer an early picture of how Americans are coping with the coronavirus pandemic. The roughly 11.2 million Americans who live with serious mental illness are the most vulnerable to the psychological effects of the pandemic. But even people who have never experienced a mental disorder are feeling many of the same symptoms. With this new system, trained specialists, counselors first listen to your story and validate what you're going through. Then they recommend resources to help you manage your symptoms.

Ultimately, the psychological impact of the pandemic will harm far more people than the virus itself. And the widespread emotional trauma it's evoking will be long lasting, experts say. Already, more than 4 in 10 Americans say that stress related to the pandemic has had a negative impact on their mental health, according to an April poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

The best part of this program is that it's not a one-time deal. Individuals will be able to opt in for calls or texts to ensure that they're being checked up on regularly.

Thank you to Senator Zucker for introducing this bill. If there is one time Marylanders need to know that #YouAreNotAlone, it's now. For these reasons, NAMI Maryland asks for a favorable report on SB 719.