



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association**

To the Senate Finance Committee

February 4, 2022

Senate Bill 241- Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services- 9-8-8 Trust Fund

### **Position: Support**

Chair Kelly, Vice Chair Feldman and members of the Finance Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of SB 24-Behavioral Health Crisis Response Service- 9-8-8 Trust Fund.

MRHA supports all initiatives that improve access to behavioral health treatment and timely crisis intervention. It is our understanding that this bill will align Maryland's efforts with a federal initiative. This is helpful for our members, as most of our rural areas border other states and media markets. Aligning with the federal program will facilitate consistent messaging and build on the important work begun by local call centers.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MHRA thanks you for your careful consideration of this issue.

*Board President, Jennifer Berkman, 443-783-0480*