



The Maryland State Medical Society

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Maryland Chapter
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TO: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair
Members, House Health and Government Operations Committee
The Honorable Malcolm Augustine

FROM: Danna L. Kauffman
Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
Christine K. Krone

DATE: March 30, 2022

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 241 – *Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund*

On behalf of the Maryland State Medical Society, the Maryland Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians, the Mid-Atlantic Association of Community Health Centers, the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Maryland Clinical Social Work Coalition, we submit this letter of **support** for Senate Bill 241. This bill establishes the 9-8-8 Trust Fund for the purpose of providing reimbursement for costs associated with: (1) designating and maintaining 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline; and (2) developing and implementing a Statewide initiative for the coordination and delivery of the continuum of behavioral health crisis response services in the State.

In 2020, Congress passed, and the President signed into law the National Suicide Designation Act of 2020, which establishes 9-8-8 as a universal number for mental health crises and suicide prevention. In July 2022, 9-8-8 will go live. Beginning then, all phone companies will route 9-8-8 calls to local crisis call centers that are part of the Lifeline network. The local crisis call centers provide 24/7 free, confidential emotional support to individuals calling for help. It is expected that calls to the Lifeline will significantly increase when the new number goes live. The need for 9-8-8 and the access to a continuum of crisis services is greater than ever, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide has become a leading cause of death in the United States, with the rate the highest in ages 10-34 years old. Maryland needs to ensure that its existing eight local call centers are adequately resourced to support this influx of calls for help.

The above organizations recognize that these efforts will need to span multi-years and that Senate Bill 241 is the first step. We urge a favorable report.

For more information call:

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