

**Senate Bill 3: 9-8-8 Trust Fund – Funding
Budget and Taxation Committee
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Position: SUPPORT**

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My name is Eileen Zeller and I retired from the federal government’s Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in 2018, where I was Lead Public Health Advisor in the Suicide Prevention Branch. In that role I managed a team of public health professionals responsible for national grant programs including the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Suicide Prevention Resource Center, and a range of state, tribal, and campus suicide prevention programs.

In retirement, I chair the Maryland Governor’s Commission on Suicide Prevention and serve on the board of directors of the Mental Health Association of Maryland. But today I am representing myself.

The Governor’s Commission on Suicide Prevention is dedicated to promoting comprehensive and coordinated programs and services designed to reduce the incidence of suicide and suicide attempts, and to promote resilience, hope, and healing. The Commission is charged with developing a state Suicide Prevention Plan every two years. In the 2022-2024 Plan that we submitted to the Governor this past fall, we called for strengthening Maryland’s crisis care system, including integrating 988 with crisis response services.

The 9-8-8 Trust Fund addresses this issue by implementing a statewide initiative to coordinate and deliver the continuum of behavioral health crisis response services, including crisis call centers, mobile crisis team services, crisis stabilization centers, and other acute behavioral health care services.

Communities with a continuum of behavioral health crisis services provide people in crisis with appropriate care: the right care in the right place at the right time. They divert people from emergency rooms and from criminal justice involvement, and prevent hospital readmissions, overuse of law enforcement, and suicide.¹ Maryland’s 9-8-8 crisis centers stand at the heart of that continuum.

As anticipated, Maryland’s launch of 988 in July 2022 resulted in significant increases in crisis calls and texts. SB3 would increase the allocation for the 9-8-8 Trust Fund and help ensure sustainable funding so that Marylanders in crisis are connected to the services they desperately need, when they need them.

I therefore urge a favorable report on SB3.

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). *National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care – A Best Practice Toolkit*. 2020. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/national-guidelines-for-behavioral-health-crisis-care-02242020.pdf>