

SB0030 (HB0138) Public Safety- 3-1-1 Systems-Non Emergency Information

Maryland needs a Statewide 311 system. 911 centers, already dangerously understaffed, are inundated with calls that are not truly emergencies. Water line breaks, traffic signals, animal and noise complaints, abandoned vehicles and the list goes on. There are a handful of counties and municipalities in Maryland that have implemented 311 in various forms. Some you can call, some are online, some 24/7 with a live agent and others not. A single number for all non-emergency calls will not only provide a better experience for Maryland residents, but it will reduce the overflow and extended wait times for callers trying to reach 911 in an emergency.

I worked for Anne Arundel County 911 for 35 years. When multiple 911 calls are coming in and they are not an emergency, the caller is placed on hold while the 911 Specialist grabs the next 911 call. Necessary, but not good customer service. While these multiple lines are ringing and your family is having a true emergency, you wonder why no has answered. Many of us may recall the incident that made news last year when a child was having a seizure and difficulty breathing while her mother was unable to get thru to 911 for a few minutes.

There are a few counties and municipalities in Maryland with 311. A statewide system would enable ALL Maryland residents to call 311 for non-emergency and county/city services. 911 Specialist would be available to answer emergency calls faster. Residents calling 311 will reach an agent who can best assist them.

In 2020 NENA APCO & NFPA collaborated, updating the Standard for answering 911 calls. For my entire career the Standard was 911 calls will be answered within 10 seconds, 90% of the time. In 2020 it was changed to 90% within 15 seconds and 95% within 20 seconds. Basically, due to increased call volumes and staffing shortages, 911 agencies were consistently unable to reach the Standard, so the standard was lowered. Maryland 911 Board along with PSAP directors discussed and decided to maintain the 10 second for 90% of 911 calls standard in Maryland. We did not feel lowering our standards was in the best interest of Maryland residents. This standard is part of each PSAP's annual inspection. I respectfully urge you to bring 311 Statewide to Maryland.