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Delegate Ken Kerr presenting, HB 138 Statewide 3-1-1.

In 2021, Senator Kagan brought to HGO SB631, after it passed the senate unanimously. That bill was intended to create a study to determine the need for a statewide 3-1-1 system. During that March 31, 2021 hearing in HGO, this committee suggested there was no need for a study and we should just go ahead and do create a statewide 3-1-1. Over the interim, prior to the 2022 legislative session, the 3-1-1 workgroup along with HGO members Delegates, Cullison, Hill, and (former Delegate) Krebs as well as representatives from state agencies, 9-1-1, 2-1-1, MACo, MDEM, DoIT, and industry partners met and the result was last year's HB1003 and SB749, a bill to establish a statewide 3-1-1 system.

After a positive hearing where the bill was well received, it failed to progress over questions related to funding. Interim discussions with the then-Governor-elect's team and subsequent discussion with the governor and with Congressman Trone have been taking place to identify the funding.

In brief, 3-1-1 is a single point of contact for any Maryland resident to access non-emergency government services. Everyone is familiar with 9-1-1 in use in the USA and 10 other countries for emergency services. Alarmingly, about 37% of the calls received by 9-1-1 are non-emergencies which slow the system, sap resources, and distract 9-1-1 specialists from fulfilling their important mission. A fallen tree is blocking my road, my trash didn't get picked up. An abandoned vehicle has been parked outside my house for a month. I have no electricity, where can I get a COVID vaccine? Important—but not emergencies.

There is also Maryland 2-1-1 for access to mental health and substance use issues, 9-8-8 (for with the Senate just voted to invest \$12million) is the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 5-1-1 for traffic, so you might be thinking people will get confused. Well, 3-1-1 is there to avoid the guesswork and confusion. Each of the X11 numbers can easily transfer the caller to the appropriate emergency or non-emergency number. This gets the caller to the resource they need quickly and efficiently without overburdening the agency initially receiving the call. You have in your floor system a document titled "Reasons to call X-1-1."

This is what will be part of a public information campaign to inform residents about the 3-digit options and when to use which, but as I mentioned, each of these 3-digit codes can route the call to the appropriate system using a chart like this.

While some Maryland residents do not have computer, smart device, or reliable internet service, almost everyone has a phone of some sort. Statewide 3-1-1 connects those residents with the government services they need without having to do a Google search.

3-1-1 is currently offered in 6 counties with varying levels of development: Anne Arundel, Baltimore County and City, Montgomery, and Prince George's. Additionally, St. Mary's County has an on-line version. So, you may ask, "What happens to them?" You have in your floor system a document titled Statewide 3-1-1 Options. Counties happy with their system can continue to operate it independently and cooperate with the statewide system at their own expense, or they can join the statewide 3-1-1 system and reallocate those county funds for other local priorities.

There is no question that 9-1-1 has saved countless lives and property. These 9-1-1 specialists have a stressful job requiring a lot of skill and experience a lot of burnout. Statewide 3-1-1 can serve as both a training experience for new specialists and as a place to take a respite from the stress of emergency response work, they can also assist in training new 3-1-1 operators, or ramp down their careers, while continuing to provide a public service.

Like last year, you are probably wondering how we are going to pay for this. As previously mentioned, Congressman David Trone, who serves on the House Appropriations Committee. has been working to identify and procure federal funding, and there are ongoing discussions with MDEM and DBM over state funding.

Also, the fiscal note came in at less than we had anticipated--\$2.2M in FY23 to hire and equip administrative and support staff and begin training operators, \$12.5M in FY24 for the initial purchase of hardware and software. And around \$9M a year in the out years for personnel and operating costs to maintain, replace, and upgrade equipment.

There will **not** be a fee added to telephone bills or use of 9-1-1 money to fund statewide 3-1-1. However, I would suggest, relieving the 9-1-1 system from handling non-emergency calls and lightening the burden on public safety more than justifies the cost of a statewide 3-1-1 system.

As we work to rebuild state government and establish good customer service relationships with our constituents, Statewide 3-1-1 is a 21st Century solution to connecting Maryland residents and those visiting Maryland with the assistance and services they need, quickly and efficiently.

I request a favorable report from the committee.

Delegate Kenneth P Kerr, EdD
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