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**SB3 9-8-8 Trust Fund - Funding
FAVORABLE
House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 21, 2023**

Good afternoon, Chair Pena-Melnyk and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB3 9-8-8 Trust Fund - Funding sponsored by Senator Augustine. I am Lois Meszaros, member of the AARP Maryland Executive Council, resident of Anne Arundel County, and a licensed psychologist. AARP, one of the largest membership-based organizations in Maryland, encompassing more than 850,000 members, supports SB3.

SB3 would require the Governor to include in the annual budget bill for fiscal year 2025, an appropriation of \$12,000,000 to the 9-8-8 Trust Fund.

As a licensed psychologist in Severna Park with a private clinical practice, I continue to receive requests from older adults who have been unable to locate a therapist who is accepting new referrals, as therapists continue to be overwhelmed with requests. These older adults continue to express feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression. They are attempting to navigate a strange new world of more social media and less human contact. Offering them access to a trained mental health professional by calling 9-8-8 is a quick and easy way for them to get help immediately. These mental health professionals are available 24/7 and assist callers with behavioral health problems.

With the launching of 9-8-8 as Maryland's suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis hotline in July 2022 there was an increase in usage. In January 2023 vs January 2022, calls answered by 9-8-8 increased 57%, chats answered increased by 246%, and text increased by 1608%. The passage of this bill will ensure Maryland's 9-8-8 system is better suited to manage the increasing call, chat and text volume of people seeking crisis services and ensuring that individuals receive the services they need.

As a psychologist in Maryland, I am very aware of the volume of unmet behavioral health needs for older adults throughout our State. People are waiting days and even months for needed services. The passage of this bill will help provide and expand needed behavioral health services to thousands of people in a timely manner.

For these reasons, AARP Maryland respectfully asks the House Health and Government Operations Committee to issue a favorable report for SB3. If you have questions, please call Tammy Bresnahan, Senior Director of Advocacy at 410-302-8451 or at tbresnahan@aarp.org.