



Maryland Chapter

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF
EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS

TO: The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair
Members, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
The Honorable Guy Guzzone

FROM: Danna L. Kauffman
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DATE: February 28, 2024

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 974 – *Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees*

The Maryland Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians (MDACEP), which represents the interests of emergency physicians and their patients throughout the State of Maryland, **supports** Senate Bill 974. This bill creates permanent funding for the 9-8-8 trust fund through a surcharge on cellular lines.

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 went live and all phone companies route 9-8-8 calls to local crisis call centers that are part of the Lifeline network, which provide 24/7 free, confidential, emotional support to individuals calling for help. 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.

As the health care safety net, the emergency department is often the first – and sometimes only – point of contact for individuals experiencing mental health crises or other behavioral health challenges. 9-8-8 is an important partner to ensure individuals experiencing mental health, substance use, and/or suicide crises receive help when it is needed most. Ensuring that 9-8-8 is not hampered by inadequate funding is an important step to ensure access to mental health services. Senate Bill 974 provides permanent funding, rather than requiring a general fund appropriation each year, and MDACEP urges a favorable report.