



Maryland Youth Advisory Council

c/o Governor's Office Children
100 Community Place,
Crownsville, MD 21032

Alex Hossainkhail, *Chair*

Thomas Evans, *Vice-Chair*
Folashade Epebinu, *Secretary*

February 7, 2025

Re: HB 421 | 9-1-1 Trust Fund - 9-8-8 Suicide Prevention Hotline

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and the Health and Government Operations Committee,

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council (MYAC) is proud to represent a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders who serve as the voice for youth across Maryland. As appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, the Maryland Association of Student Councils, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland, we seize every opportunity to influence legislation, spread public awareness, and bridge the gap between youth and policymakers.

HB 421 expands the allowable uses of the 9–1–1 Trust Fund to support the operations of the 9–8–8 Suicide Prevention Hotline. Recent data underscore the urgency of this measure. The Maryland Youth Pandemic Behavior Survey from the Maryland Department of Health¹ found that nearly one in five Maryland teens seriously considered suicide in 2021, highlighting an escalating mental health crisis among our youth. **HB 421** is a direct response to this challenge, ensuring that individuals in crisis receive timely, effective, and coordinated care.

By enabling shared investments—such as enhanced software integration and joint training between 9–1–1 and 9–8–8 services—**HB 421** will increase efficiency and reduce response times. National data from the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline reveal that since its implementation, contact volume has surged, with reports indicating an 80% increase in calls, texts, and chats. Such statistics make it clear that our crisis response infrastructure must evolve to meet rising demand.

Importantly, **HB 421** does not divert resources from our emergency response systems. Instead, it allows for smarter use of funds—ensuring that both 9–1–1 and 9–8–8 services benefit from investments in critical technology and training. By increasing the effectiveness of mental health programs and better integrating counselors and Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs), **HB 421** supports our commitment to enhancing mental health resources for Maryland’s youth.

The council advocates for **HB293** as it aligns with the Council’s Legislative Platform supporting:

- I. Proactive measures to ensure student and school personnel safety and to prevent school violence and vandalism.

¹ <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ohpetup/Documents/2021%20Youth%20Pandemic%20Behavior%20Survey%20Detailed%20Report.pdf?>

By endorsing **HB 421**, you will help ensure that our state's public safety systems are equipped to deliver the specialized care our communities urgently need. We respectfully request the committee puts forth a favorable report on **HB 421**. Our youth deserve an emergency services network that not only responds to physical crises but also addresses the pressing mental health challenges of today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex Hossainkhail". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alex" and the last name "Hossainkhail" clearly distinguishable.

Alex Hossainkhail
Chair, Maryland Youth Advisory Council