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HB 0009

February 10, 2026

TO: Members of the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of the Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: HB 0009 3-1-1 Systems - Expansion Program and Oversight Board - Establishment

POSITION: LETTER OF INFORMATION

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) has concerns with House Bill 0009 3-1-1 Systems - Expansion Program and Oversight Board - Establishment.

HB 0009 would establish a Maryland 3-1-1 Oversight Board within the Maryland Information Network, requires the board to establish a 3-1-1 program, requires the board to develop a set of unified data standards for 3-1-1 systems, and mandates the use of centralized artificial intelligence (AI) powered chat- and voicebot software to answer questions and route calls statewide. Finally, the bill requires the expansion of the 3-1-1 Program to all of the counties in Maryland.

We appreciate the General Assembly's commitment to expanding access to non-emergency government services and modernizing customer engagement tools. BCA aligns strongly with intent of HB 0009 which is to improve equity and accessibility in how residents interact with local government. However, from the standpoint of a large jurisdiction that operates a robust, integrated 3-1-1 program, we have operational, technical, governance, and fiscal concerns regarding the mandates and structure proposed in this legislation.

Overview of Baltimore City's 311 Program:

In Baltimore City, 3-1-1 connects Baltimore residents, businesses & visitors to city services. Users can choose whether they wish to speak with a live agent, visit 3-1-1 online, or use the 3-1-1 mobile app. Residents can report a problem, request a service, and check the status of a service request. Residents also use 3-1-1 to receive information about City programs and the latest events. In a large city, it is imperative that their 3-1-1 center can quickly pivot to support the needs of its residents. For instance, during the recent January 2026 snowstorm, our 3-1-1 center was able to create two new service requests and train 3-1-1 agents over the course of three hours to support a new City initiative recruiting volunteers to shovel the

sidewalks of neighbors in need and to collect service requests from those residents in need of shoveling assistance.

BCA Considerations

The creation of a centralized Maryland 3-1-1 oversight board with authority to designate which counties it oversees, select vendors, and establish statewide data standards raises significant concerns. Mature 3-1-1 systems are deeply embedded in local agency workflows, labor agreements, ordinances, and performance management structures. Technology and service design decisions directly impact daily municipal operations and should remain locally governed. A statewide middle layer would insert new handoffs and place Baltimore City 3-1-1's strategic leadership in the hands of entities without specific knowledge of municipal workflows and constraints. This is especially concerning given that local municipalities, the entities most directly responsible for service outcomes, are woefully underrepresented in the structure of the proposed 3-1-1 oversight board. An oversight board with limited 3-1-1 foundational mutuality risks misalignment between the state, emergency, and human-services-based organizations that would provide oversight of a local government service delivery program.

BCA is concerned about the stated purpose of 3-1-1 oversight more broadly. In the corresponding study to these dual bills published on November 1, 2025, the *Workgroup to Study Implementation of an Expanded 3-1-1 Nonemergency System* grounds the purpose of statewide oversight in the need to divert non-emergency calls away from 9-1-1 emergency lines. The accompanying feasibility study argues for a more coordinated nonemergency response system that would ease pressure on 9-1-1 and deliver faster, more accountable service to residents. Baltimore City was the first large city in the nation to establish a 3-1-1/9-1-1 system, in October 1996. At the time, the Baltimore Police Department was handling 1.4 million calls a year, nearly 60 percent of which were nonemergency calls. BCA agrees that offsetting non-emergency calls is crucial in ensuring that true emergency situations are mitigated expeditiously. In calendar year 2025, 3-1-1 received 179,589 non-emergency calls. However, Baltimore's 3-1-1 has a more expansive programmatic purpose than its original intent of 9-1-1 call diversion. In 2025, 3-1-1 received 420,461 calls for city services. 3-1-1 generates work orders that feed directly into agency systems, tracks and measures agency performance, and is a data engine used to allocate resources and funding. This feedback loop is essential in maintaining internal alignment and accountability. Designating the purpose of 3-1-1 to 9-1-1 call diversion disincentivizes metrics that are locally driven such as service quality, accessibility, issue resolution and resident satisfaction in favor of metrics generated in the service of 9-1-1, an essential but very different operation.

Additionally, HB 0009 mandates the creation of an AI chatbot and voicebot as the centralizing tools whereby residents, both those currently with and without 3-1-1 service, will access information and services. BCA welcomes the implementation of modern technologies; however, they are one piece of a complex service system. Chatbots and voicebots cannot create a service request but their implementation will be advertised as a newly created statewide 3-1-1 system. While diverting informational requests through AI powered technologies can free up time and support resource management, unless this new program also plans to establish a centralized work order system, this technology will not be robust as the chatbot will not be able to assist customers with actual service request creation. Furthermore, a statewide work order system would be inadvisable because of the complexity of workflows and integrations needed with other city systems that vary by jurisdiction. Technology is meant to augment a customer's experience, rather than result in a more generalized, frustrating experience. Local 3-1-1 teams create service requests and can respond specifically by drawing on knowledge bases that extend past the

local jurisdiction's website. Informational requests also include service request related questions, inquires related to policy implementation and interpretation, program eligibility screening, and de-escalation of frustrated callers. A human-centered approach or a combined approach ensures accessibility to all residents.

Finally, HB 0009 and its corresponding report are vague on the question of whether the program is voluntary or compulsory. Though both make mention of 3-1-1 programs that are not participating in this statewide oversight program, the bill empowers the Maryland 3-1-1 Oversight Board accordingly -

THE BOARD SHALL: 26 (1) DESIGNATE COUNTIES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM,

and further states -

ON OR BEFORE JULY 1, 2028, THE BOARD SHALL IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM IN EACH COUNTY IN THE STATE ACCORDING TO THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN SUBMITTED UNDER § 1-3A-05(B) OF THIS SUBTITLE.

BCA requests more information regarding whether the program is voluntary or compulsory. Municipal 3-1-1 centers are fully funded, staffed, and managed at the local level. Implementing recommendations from a statewide board would require data analysis and compliance with new standardization formats, costly system configuration changes, and legal and procurement review of shared standards or agreements. A parallel system would reduce efficiency while increasing costs. Local municipalities would likely need to dedicate operational and technological resources to ensure these two systems speak to each other including reconciling new service request types, dashboards, workflow fields, and other integrations. Without funding for system changes, integration, or transition support, municipalities could face significant unfunded technology and process costs.

3-1-1 systems are the cornerstone of modern local government as it gives residents a simple way to access services, report problems, and get reliable information without navigating complex systems. BCA shares the state's goal of expanding equitable, modern access to non-emergency government services. Successful 3-1-1 systems are not just technology platforms as they are deeply integrated service delivery operations built around local accountability, human expertise, and community trust. A statewide framework can be valuable if it mirrors established collaboration models which are based on knowledge transfers. As 3-1-1 is a critical component of municipal infrastructure, a statewide model should not disrupt dependable structures nor infringe upon local autonomy.

For these reasons, the Baltimore City Administration respectfully requests **consideration of the above information** on HB0009.