

Bill: HB 9 3-1-1 Systems – Expansion Program and Oversight Board – Establishment

To: Government, Labor and Elections Committee

Testimony of Kenyn Benjamin, President & CEO, Maryland Information Network (MdInfoNet)

Position: Favorable

Madame Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 9. My name is Kenyn Benjamin, and I serve as President & CEO of the Maryland Information Network, the nonprofit that operates 211 Maryland. Every day, Marylanders turn to us for help navigating housing insecurity, utility bill assistance, food assistance, and countless other challenges. We witness, in real time, the difference it makes when residents have a clear, trusted place to contact for support.

House Bill 9 is not simply a technology bill. It is a public-safety bill, a modernization bill, and an equity bill. It creates a statewide approach to helping Marylanders get answers quickly without having to guess whether to dial 9-1-1, hunt through county websites, or give up altogether.

The Gap Maryland Must Close

Today, more than 40% of Marylanders *do not* live in a jurisdiction with a 3-1-1 system. That means we are asking residents, especially those in rural and suburban communities, to navigate the government with no easy point of entry. We also know that many Marylanders call 9-1-1 simply because they are unclear where else to turn with nonemergency questions.

The Workgroup studying 3-1-1 expansion made it clear: Maryland has the opportunity to be the **first state in the nation** to create a unified, AI-supported 3-1-1 system that improves public access, supports local government, and meaningfully reduces unnecessary 9-1-1 traffic.

House bill 9 is the vehicle to make that happen.

This bill establishes the Maryland 3-1-1 Program and Oversight Board and begins with a phased pilot that includes two counties with 311 systems and two without. It focuses on proper governance, local county input, and data-driven system design. Key elements include:

- Statewide data standards that allow all counties to measure, compare, and improve service delivery.
- County-approved content for all AI chatbots and voicebots, ensuring accuracy and preserving local control.
- Multilingual, accessible tools to meet residents where they are - online, by phone, or by text.
- Clear evaluation deadlines, including metrics on 9-1-1 call diversion, user satisfaction, accessibility, cost impacts, and readiness for statewide rollout.

Why Maryland Information Network Is Prepared to Lead

The Workgroup recommended placing the Oversight Board within the Maryland Information Network because it already operates a statewide infrastructure designed for governance, standards-setting, data integration, and cross-jurisdictional coordination – core capabilities required to administer a successful 3-1-1 system.

Under HB 9, Maryland Information Network will:

- Staff and coordinate the Oversight Board
- Run the request for proposal process and present vendor options
- Support the implementation of AI tools and standardized data systems

Peer jurisdictions show that smart, AI-enabled 3-1-1 systems can ultimately save money while increasing capacity to address residents' needs. Maryland can and should achieve the same.

Maryland Information Network stands ready to partner with the General Assembly, the administration, and county leaders to turn this vision into reality.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 9.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kenyn Benjamin,
President & CEO