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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB631: Workgroup to Study and Implement a Statewide 3-1-1 Nonemergency Telephone System

House Health and Government Operations Committee

Wednesday, March 31, 2021, 1:00 PM

3-1-1 is an effective and expanding public service that can provide answers to non-emergency questions that might include COVID tests and vaccines; animal control; or trash and recycling. This service is featured on the [Governor's website](#), but only six counties (Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Montgomery, Prince George's, St. Mary's, and Baltimore City) currently offer 3-1-1. Other counties may wish to provide this service, but fiscal constraints are an obstacle.

Many residents can't navigate the bureaucracy of county government, especially when there are dozens of departments. Thousands of phone numbers or email addresses online lead to confusion. Residents contacting the wrong person or office, wasting time for both the employee and the resident.

Before 3-1-1 was established in Montgomery County (MC311), there were 38 major offices and departments with more than 13,000 telephone numbers and over 10,000 email accounts. MC311 provides a single, easy number to call and get answers. **Forty call-takers handle an impressive 43,000-45,000 calls per month.** The average cost per call has since been reduced, as centrally located generalists could take the same volume of calls as hundreds of specialists in the various departments.

Our 9-1-1 Specialists are bombarded with non-emergency calls that take precious moments away from the urgent need for police, fire, or paramedics. **The Next Generation 9-1-1 Commission I am honored to Chair endorsed the implementation of a statewide 3-1-1 network-- effectively lightening the load on our 9-1-1 Centers.** SB631 was drafted to establish a statewide, 24-hour 3-1-1 service with two offices — one urban and one rural. The 3-1-1 system would be housed under the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and collaborate with our 24 counties. A centralized statewide program would:

- Relay important information to people in rural communities without broadband access or lower-income neighbors without Wi-Fi;
- Reduce the workload of our 9-1-1 Centers;
- Provide a training opportunity for potential future 9-1-1 Specialists; and
- Give longtime 9-1-1 Specialists a way to wrap up their careers by training and mentoring 3-1-1 call-takers.

After reviewing this bill with MEMA and other stakeholder partners, I realized that our timetable was a bit optimistic. The bill as amended would create a short-term workgroup, facilitated by MEMA, to study the operations, telecommunications technology, logistics, staffing, costs, and other details to implement a Statewide 3-1-1 system. Members would include:

- Two Senators;
- Two Delegates;
- Executive Director of the Maryland Emergency Management Agency or designee;
- Executive Director of the 9-1-1 Board or designee;
- The Secretary of the Department of Information Technology or designee;
- The Secretary of the Department of Aging or designee;
- The Secretary of the Department of Disabilities or designee;
- Two Public Safety Answering Point representatives from counties **with** 3-1-1;
- Two Public Safety Answering Point representatives from counties **without** 3-1-1;
- One telecommunications industry representative;
- One representative from the Maryland Association of Counties; and
- One representative from the Maryland Municipal League.

This legislation is endorsed by the Governor, and MEMA's Executive Director testified in support of the bill in the Senate. **As amended, this legislation passed the Senate unanimously. I urge a favorable report on SB631 on this exciting new concept to provide needed information to residents and visitors across the State!**