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Title: **Maryland Department of Health – 2-1-1 Maryland-Mental Health Services (Phone Call Program)**

Testimony of Quinton Askew, President/CEO 211 Maryland

Before the Health & Government Operations Committee

February 23, 2021

Good afternoon, Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk and honorable members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to comment in **Support of HB 812 Maryland Department of Health – 2-1-1 Maryland – Mental Health Services Phone Call Program**. This proposed legislation does several things, including providing proactive support to reduce an individual’s crisis, a caring connection with a crisis specialist when needed, and improved access to care with a direct connection to mental health and crisis services.

Marylanders who choose to opt into this service for a follow-up call will be able to access this service in multiple ways:

- 1) **SMS/Text**: easily text a created keyword to 898211.
- 2) **Online**: through an automated registration form.
- 3) **Simply Dial 211**: and connect to an automated call back feature.

Marylanders who opt in will be supported by one of our Call Center Network- Crisis Specialist who will assess their needs and link to the appropriate resource. Our network of call centers has extensive experience in Mental Health First Aid and Trauma Informed Care. They are Nationally Accredited, through American Association of Suicidology (AAS), Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS), CARF Accreditation, the International Council for Helplines and support the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Nationally 2-1-1 is recognized as the most comprehensive source for locally curated human service information, with over 8000 statewide resources in our database.

. Marylanders are trying to cope with the new normal of life during this pandemic. Many are dealing with anxiety, stress, grief and facing uncertainty with what the future holds. Since the pandemic, 2-1-1 Maryland has been the state’s central connector to needed resources and a first responder to those in crisis, through our 211 press 1 crisis line.

During these difficult times, it is important for Marylanders to know that they are not alone, and help is available when needed. This legislation will provide a lifeline and an empathetic voice to many who are in need. As someone who has lost a loved one last month to suicide, and understand the toll it takes on a family, I urge you to consider the positive statewide impact this legislation will have and respectfully request a favorable report for HB 812

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I welcome any questions.

Quinton Askew

President/CEO

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