



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

February 23, 2021

House Bill 812 Maryland Department of Health - 2-1-1 Maryland - Mental Health Services
Phone Call Program

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, Delegate Cullison, and members of the Health and Government Operations, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 812 Maryland Department of Health - 2-1-1 Maryland - Mental Health Services Phone Call Program.

MRHA supports this legislation that would establish an opt-in mental health services phone call program using the 2-1-1 health, crisis, and social services line that would require a center to call individuals who have opted into the mental health services phone call program on a periodic basis and attempt to connect individuals to a provider of mental health services.

In rural Maryland where access to behavioral and mental health services are limited, this service line would be of great benefit to those seeking mental health care. Especially during this pandemic, the establishment of secure, audio telehealth care options would increase access to these necessary behavioral health services for rural Marylanders.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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