

**TESTIMONY FOR SB 631**  
**“WORKGROUP TO STUDY AND IMPLEMENT A STATEWIDE 3-1-1 NONEMERGENCY TELEPHONE SYSTEM”**  
**HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**  
**MARCH 31, 2021**

**Chair Pendergrass and Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk –**

My name is Russell Strickland and I am the Executive Director of the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). I am here to testify for SB 631, which would establish a workgroup to study and implement a statewide 3-1-1 nonemergency telephone system. I offer this not just in my capacity as the current Director of MEMA, but also based on my experience as a local emergency services director in Harford County, and someone who began my career as a 17 years old police dispatcher / clerk, and one of the first 911 call takers working the original PBX board.

This bill would establish a workgroup to study the need and feasibility of implementing a 3-1-1 system in Maryland. In many Maryland counties and municipalities, a large percentage of calls to 9-1-1 centers are not the type of emergencies that require the immediate dispatch of fire departments, law enforcement or emergency medical technicians. Rather, many calls are for less urgent matters, like a car blocking someone’s driveway, broken traffic signals, or tree removal. Where 3-1-1 systems have been implemented, like in Baltimore City and Baltimore County, the volume of calls to 9-1-1 centers have eased, allowing 9-1-1 personnel to focus more squarely on the most urgent threats.

The establishment of a 3-1-1 call center, beyond easing the burden on local 9-1-1 centers, would allow the State to support the local jurisdictions for training and building experience to newer dispatchers before they are thrust into the high-stress world of 9-1-1 call centers. The 3-1-1 call center can serve as a training ground for early career professionals in this regard. Additionally, the 3-1-1 call center can serve as a temporary reprieve for more experienced dispatchers who have been forced to handle a voluminous and stressful set of 9-1-1 calls.

This workgroup, comprised of subject matter experts and key stakeholders, will conduct a study to determine how best to implement 3-1-1 in jurisdictions who currently do not have a system. The results of this study will be a plan on how best to develop and implement a system that provides equitable access to 3-1-1 services statewide. Members will consider important questions such as how existing 3-1-1 centers will either integrate with a statewide system or jointly operate independently and what level of resources are required to implement such a system.

MEMA can assist with the workgroup and further developing the concept. The Agency already runs a statewide watch center that handles similar duties as a 3-1-1 system, has experience and the physical infrastructure to assume the duties of a 24/7 call center, and is not a single

discipline-oriented agency. MEMA also has experience standing-up new call centers, most recently establishing school violence hotline.

I thank the Committee for its work on this bill.

Russell Strickland  
Executive Director, Maryland Emergency Management Agency