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SB 241
Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund
Hearing of The Senate Finance Committee
February 8, 2022
1:00 PM

SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health Rights Project supports policies and practices that promote the overall health of Marylanders struggling to make ends meet, with the explicit goal of promoting strategies that work to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes. **PJC strongly supports SB 241**, which designates 988 as Maryland’s suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis hotline and establishes a steady funding source for existing behavioral health crisis call centers throughout the State.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting isolation and job loss has created an increased need for on-demand behavioral health crisis services for children and adults in Maryland and a nationwide increase in calls to crisis hotlines. Although mental illness impact all races, ethnicities and other identities, research supports that people of color and individuals identifying as LGBTQ are disproportionately impacted.¹ Similarly, substance use disorder (SUD) is increasing among low-income individuals, with 4.6 million Medicaid beneficiaries across the country (approximately 8% of the total Medicaid population) in SUD treatment.² **Now more than ever, Marylanders need an effective access point to crisis services.**

In 2020, Congress passed legislation to designate 988 as the official phone number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. By converting the existing ten-digit Lifeline number to an easy to remember three-digit

¹ Though 21% of all adults in the United States experience a 12 month prevalence of any mental illness, Black (17%), Asian (14%), Hispanic (18%), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders (17%) and American Native or Alaska Native (19%) adults experience a 12 month prevalence of any mental illness compared to white adults (21%). 44% of lesbian, gay and bisexual adults experience a 12 month prevalence of any mental illness. NAMI, *You Are Not Alone Statistics* (2020), https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI_YouAreNotAlone_2020_FINAL.pdf.

² U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, *Report to Congress: T-MSIS Substance Use Disorder Data Book – Treatment of SUD in Medicaid 2018* (2021), <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/data-systems/downloads/2018-sud-data-book.pdf>.

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number, individuals in crisis will have an easy-to-remember and much needed pathway to local crisis services. SB 241 would ensure that when 988 goes live in July 2022, Maryland's eight local crisis call centers will have the resources to handle the anticipated increase in calls for crisis services. If passed, SB 241 would enhance the growth of behavioral health crisis responses services in Maryland including mobile crisis team services and crisis stabilization centers. **Increasing the availability of these services would help children and adults receive the care they need in the community and avoid unnecessary hospitalization.**

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **SB 241**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 x 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.