



MARYLAND CITIZENS' HEALTH INITIATIVE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 241

Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services 9-8-8 Fund

Before the Senate Finance Committee

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Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 241. We especially thank Senator Augustine for being the lead sponsor for the bill.

Thanks to federal action, starting in July, 2022 the phone number 988 will become the national Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Hotline. It is critical that Maryland's eight local call centers have the resources they need to provide free, confidential emotional support to Marylanders in crisis, and that Maryland invest in the continuum of behavioral health crisis response services. Without a robust system of behavioral health crisis services, those in distress often go to hospital emergency rooms. Investing in mobile crisis teams, crisis stabilization services, and other acute behavioral health services will help Marylanders in crisis avoid chaotic visits¹ to overtaxed emergency rooms, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Maryland has the unique opportunity to align with national efforts to improve access to crisis care by designating 988 as the number for our state's behavioral health crisis hotline and ensuring adequate funding to support behavioral health crisis services. Thanks to your leadership, Maryland has one of the top five health care systems in the entire nation, and SB 241 will help us continue to lead. We urge a favorable report for SB 241.

¹ <https://www.baltimoresun.com/health/bs-hs-emergency-behavioral-health-care-20180125-story.html>