



Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc.
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FAVORABLE

**Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

**SB 241 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund
Submitted by
the Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc.**

February 8, 2022

Senator Delores G. Kelley
Chair, Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairwoman Kelley and Respected Members of the Finance Committee:

The Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc. is a family support organization that provides family peer support, family navigation services, education, information advocacy to help parents and other primary caregivers who have children, youth, and young adults with behavioral health needs (mental health, substance use, and co-occurring challenges). The staff are trained and skilled family members who have raised children with behavioral health needs and therefore understand the difficulties faced by and the complex needs of the families they are serving.

The Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc. is pleased to support SB 241 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—9-8-8 Trust Fund. This bill designates 988 to be the phone number for Maryland's suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis hotline and establishes a sustainable funding source to support existing behavioral health crisis call centers in Maryland.

Congress designated 988 as the new phone number the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In July 2022, 988 will go live. Beginning then, all phone companies will route 988 calls to local crisis call centers that are part of the Lifeline network. The local crisis call centers provide 24/7 free confidential emotional support to people calling for help. It is expected that calls to the Lifeline will significantly increase when the new number goes live. Maryland needs to ensure that its existing eight local call centers are adequately resourced to support this influx of calls for help.

Many parents whose children were experiencing behavioral health emergencies had to stay hours in hospital emergency rooms, resulting in delays in care. Young adults suffering from a behavioral health emergency, especially those of color or belonging to marginalized groups, have been subjected to the inappropriate use of force, which often led to an arrest.

988 will reduce suicides and mental health crises and serve as an alternative to calling 911 or going to the hospital emergency room and as a deterrent to having law enforcement involvement. Those experiencing behavioral health emergencies will have immediate access to effective suicide prevention, crisis services, and behavioral healthcare. They will receive responsive, appropriate, and compassionate services. They will be connected to call center counselors who are based locally and trained in crisis response, suicide prevention, and de-escalation. These counselors are able to provide a range of support to resolve a situation over the phone.

Sustainable funding is needed to implement 988 successfully. The Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc. is pleased that the bill establishes the 9–8–8 Trust Fund as a special, nonlapsing fund and requires interest earnings of the Fund to be credited to the Fund. The Fund will provide reimbursement for costs associated with:

- Designating and maintaining 9–8–8 as the universal telephone number for a National Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Hotline in accordance with the Federal National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020; and
- Developing and implementing a statewide initiative for the coordination and delivery of the continuum of behavioral health crisis response services in the State, including:
 - Crisis Call Centers;
 - Mobile Crisis Team Services;
 - Crisis Stabilization Centers; and
 - Other acute behavioral health care services.

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 local crisis call centers. **The Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc. urges the Senate Finance Committee to pass SB 241.**

Respectfully Submitted,



Celia Serkin
Executive Director