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Senator Dolores Kelley, Chair
Senator Brian Feldman, Vice Chair
Senate Finance Committee
3 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Support-SB0241 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services-9-8-8 Trust Fund

Dear Senator Kelley, Senator Feldman, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Brain Injury Association of Maryland in support of SB0241. For the last 39 years, BIAMD has been the only statewide non-profit organization dedicated solely to providing free information and resource assistance to the brain injury community. Through its Toll-Free Brain injury Connection Center (1.800.221.6443), its website (www.biamd.org), and its social media presence, BIAMD has sought to educate, enlighten, and support the estimated 120,000 Maryland families currently living with the devastating effects of brain injury and the caregivers and professionals who support them. BIAMD regularly responds to over 300 phone calls a month from individuals living with brain injury, family members, and professionals seeking information and assistance. Brain injury can have lasting cognitive, physical, and emotional problems that increase the likelihood that a person living with a brain injury will need crisis services during their lifetime. Adequately resourcing crisis services providers and call centers with both financial and training resources will allow them to effectively assist Marylanders living with brain injury when they experience a behavioral health crisis.

The frontal lobe, which controls executive functions, decision making, impulse control and judgement, is the area that is most likely to be injured due to its location and structure of the skull. A history of brain injury increases the likelihood of a person developing mental health and substance use disorders. The combination of stressors, physical and psychological issues and impaired decision-making abilities increase the risk of attempting and completing suicide for Marylanders living with a brain injury. With these considerations we strongly recommend as part of the implementation of a fully funded behavioral health crisis system, that staff providing these services are trained to identify signs and symptoms of brain injuries and some simple, effective strategies to assist individuals living with a brain injury during a crisis.

We have heard stories from families, especially in rural communities, expressing frustration with the lack of support and coordinated follow when their loved one experienced a behavioral health crisis. Individuals ended up being taken to the emergency room and then being quickly released with little or no treatment or planning for follow up care. Families reported that they felt like they were just waiting for the next crisis and there was not enough coordinated support available in their communities to help them get out of this crisis to crisis cycle.

The Brain Injury Association of Maryland supports the creation of the 9-8-8 Trust fund to strengthen the crisis communication centers and local resources in alignment with state and federal priorities. We are willing to partner as a resource for crisis service providers and those seeking assistance to help individuals living with a brain injury and experiencing a behavioral health crisis get timely and appropriate access to care.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

Sincerely,
Catherine Rinehart Mello
Brain Injury Association of Maryland
443-364-9856