



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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SB 241

DATE: March 30, 2022

SPONSOR: Senator Augustine

ASSIGNED TO: Health & Government Operations and Appropriations

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POSITION: SUPPORT (Department of Health and Human Services)

Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9–8–8 Trust Fund

Senate Bill 241 would create a fund for the operation of the 9-8-8 universal telephone number for suicide prevention and the development and implementation of a statewide initiative for behavioral health crisis response, including crisis call centers, mobile crisis team services, and crisis stabilization centers.

Congress designated 9-8-8 as the phone number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Starting July 2022, all telecommunications companies will route 9-8-8 calls to local crisis call centers that are part of the Lifeline network, including the EveryMind hotline in Montgomery County. Local crisis call centers such as the EveryMind hotline provide 24/7 call, text and chat options free of charge to the user. 9-8-8 will provide confidential emotional support to people calling and texting for help or who are experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis. It is expected that calls and texts to the Lifeline will significantly increase when 9-8-8 is implemented. In order to meet this demand, Maryland needs to ensure that its existing eight local call centers are adequately resourced to support the anticipated influx of calls, texts, and chats for help.

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services strongly supports the creation of the Fund in order to implement crisis response programming across the state, including for the creation of crisis stabilization centers. Montgomery County is currently undertaking plans to establish a crisis stabilization center in the County and would be aided by the Fund established by Senate Bill 241 for this work.

Maryland has the unique opportunity to align with national efforts to improve access to crisis care by designating 9-8-8 as the number for our state's behavioral health crisis hotline and ensuring adequate funding to support local crisis call centers. Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services respectfully urges the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 241.