



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: Senate Bill 974 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees - Letter of Support

Dear Chair Guzzone and Committee members:

The Maryland Department of Health (Department) respectfully submits this letter of support for Senate Bill (SB) 974 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees. SB 974 establishes fees for 9-8-8 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services which will be paid by each subscriber for switched local exchange access service, commercial mobile radio service, and other 9-8-8 accessible services. The bill also establishes a fee on certain wireless retail transactions. Under HB 933, the Comptroller will deposit these fees in the 9-8-8 Trust Fund and develop procedures for collection and payment.

Currently, the 9-8-8 Trust Fund exists to provide reimbursement for costs associated with designating and maintaining 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number for national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline by the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020. The fund is also used to develop and implement a statewide initiative for the coordination and delivery of the continuum of behavioral health crisis response services in the State, including:

1. Crisis call centers;
2. Mobile crisis team services;
3. Crisis stabilization centers,
4. Other acute behavioral health care services.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that nationally one person died by suicide every 11 minutes in 2021,¹ The [9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](https://health.maryland.gov/bha/Pages/988md.aspx)² supports immediate and reliable access to suicide prevention and mental health crisis intervention. 9-8-8 provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, seven days a week, through phone, text, and chat.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>

² <https://health.maryland.gov/bha/Pages/988md.aspx>

The usage of the 9-8-8 emergency hotline is steadily increasing as more people become aware of it, thanks in part to the ongoing public awareness campaign by the Department. Since the transition from an eight to three-digit number in July 2022, monthly call volume has increased by 107%. The 9-8-8 hotline is a crucial entry point to the urgent and acute care system. The Moore-Miller Administration has included behavioral health crisis response services as part of the \$107.5 million behavioral health investment to ensure that professionals can respond when individuals face behavioral health crises and provide a safe place to stabilize.

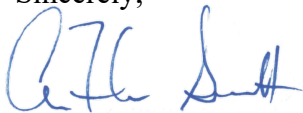
Funding for 9-8-8 is secured annually through four state and federal funds sources. This legislation assures the program's long-term sustainability and enables proper planning for program operations, similar to the 9-1-1 emergency service.

With this legislation, Maryland would join other states charging a fee to sustain 9-8-8, including California, Colorado, Delaware, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington. Additional states considering similar legislation include New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.

The Department supports SB 974 as an important step to ensure that the 9-8-8 continues to be available for Maryland residents.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Case-Herron, Director of Governmental Affairs at sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov or (443) 826-1851.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Herrera Scott".

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary