



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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

March 27, 2024

The Honorable Josephine Peña-Melnyk  
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee  
Room 240 House 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 Peña-Melnyk and Committee members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is sending a letter supporting legislation establishing fees for 9-8-8 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services. Each subscriber will pay these fees for switched local exchange access service, commercial mobile radio service, and other 9-8-8 accessible services, and prepaid wireless retail transactions will be deposited in the 9-8-8 Trust Fund by the Comptroller.

Based on HG 7.5–5A–02, 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 and 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.

Suicide rates have continued to rise in Maryland. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that one person dies by suicide every 11 minutes (based on the [number of suicides in 2021](#)<sup>1</sup>). The [9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)<sup>2</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> [wonder.cdc.gov](https://wonder.cdc.gov)

<sup>2</sup> <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 MDH. Since the transition from eight to three-digit numbers in July 2022, a significant 107% increase in monthly call volume has occurred. 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. For the fiscal year 2025, there is \$16.7 million available; however, for the following fiscal year (2026), only \$3.9 million has been identified so far, and for fiscal year 2027, the only expected funding is \$719,999 from state funds. 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.

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](mailto: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