

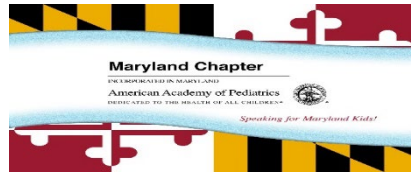


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House Health and Government Operations Committee

February 11, 2025

House Bill 421 – *Public Safety – 9-1-1 Trust Fund – 9-8-8 Suicide Prevention Hotline*

POSITION: SUPPORT

On behalf of MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Greater Washington Society for Clinical Social Work, we submit this letter of support for House Bill 421. This bill expands the purpose of the 9-1-1 Trust Fund to include funding for costs related to the operation of the 9-8-8 suicide prevention hotline, where those costs may be shared with 9-1-1 activities.

Maryland, like much of the nation, is grappling with a mental health crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and other societal challenges. The state has seen an increase in behavioral health emergencies, and the 9-8-8 hotline has become an essential resource in addressing these needs. As background, funding for 9-8-8 was established under Chapters 780 and 781 of 2024, which created a State 9-8-8 fee similar to the 9-1-1 fee structure. The 9-8-8 fee became effective on October 1, 2024, for phone line subscribers and will apply to prepaid wireless purchasers starting July 1, 2027.

Expanding the 9-1-1 Trust Fund to cover shared operational costs for 9-8-8 services will help Maryland build a more comprehensive, accessible, and responsive system for addressing behavioral health emergencies. The above-named organizations believe House Bill 421 is a critical step in improving the integration of Maryland's emergency and behavioral health response systems. By enabling the 9-1-1 Trust Fund to support joint efforts between the 9-1-1 and 9-8-8 systems, the bill will enhance coordination, improve efficiency, and reduce duplication of efforts. We urge a favorable report.

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