



Maryland
Hospital Association

February 7, 2023

To: The Honorable Joseline Peña-Melnyk, Chair, House Health & Government Operations Committee

Re: Letter of Support- House Bill 271- 9-8-8 Trust Fund- Funding

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 271.

Hospital emergency departments are often the first point of contact or the facility of last resort for individuals suffering from a behavioral health crisis. Patients and families turn to an emergency department for care when they cannot find treatment in the community or when the condition worsens to a point where an individual is at risk of dying by suicide.

Between 2013 and 2021, emergency department visits for behavioral health conditions climbed from 10.5% to 18.3%. Analysis also shows patient acuity increased—meaning, there are more patients turning to emergency departments in crisis, and they are sicker when they get there.¹

The federally mandated transition to 9-8-8 as the behavioral health crisis helpline presents Maryland with an opportunity to transform care for those with behavioral health needs with the goal to reduce suicide deaths and overall behavioral health harm.

Maryland transitioned to 9-8-8 this summer, and since then, call volume has continued to rise. Last year, this body passed [HB 293](#), which established the 9-8-8 trust fund and appropriated funding for fiscal years 2023 and 2024. House Bill 271 ensures this life-saving funding continues in fiscal year 2025.

The need is great, and it is imperative Maryland have a robust crisis services system to serve patients before they need to turn to emergency departments. The 9-8-8 trust fund dedicates funding for call centers, crisis stabilization centers, mobile crisis teams, and other components of a crisis system of care.

For these reasons, MHA urges a *favorable* report on House Bill 271.

For more information, please contact:
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¹ HSCRC Case Mix Data