



Montgomery County Mental health Advisory Committee

February 2, 2022

Written testimony in support of SB0241

Senator Bill Ferguson
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB0241/HB293

Dear President Ferguson;

The Montgomery County Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC) **is pleased to support SB 0241 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—9-8-8 Trust Fund**. This bill designates 988 to be the phone number for Maryland's suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis hotline and establishes a sustainable funding source to support existing behavioral health crisis call centers in Maryland.

MHAC was established to advise the Montgomery County Executive and the County Council on matters concerning mental health. Our work includes providing citizen oversight to all state-funded mental health agencies serving Montgomery County and serving as an advocate for a comprehensive mental health system for persons of all ages. The Committee helps to ensure that publicly-funded mental health services are responsive to local needs, accountable to the citizenry and accessible to those in need. Our work includes closely following State and County legislative proposals relating to mental health. MHAC is comprised of citizen members who serve three-year terms without compensation that includes practicing physicians in the County, mental health professionals in the County who are not physicians and individuals who are currently receiving or have in the past received mental health services as well as agency members that includes the Department of Health and Human Services, Montgomery County Public schools, and the Department of Juvenile Services.

Congress designated 988 as the new phone number the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In July 2022, 988 will go live. Beginning then, all phone companies will route 988 calls to local crisis call centers that are part of the Lifeline network. The local crisis call centers provide 24/7 free, confidential emotional support to people calling for help. It is expected that calls to the Lifeline will significantly increase when the new number goes live and Maryland needs to ensure that its existing eight local call centers are adequately resourced to support this influx of calls for help.

In the first six months of 2020, there were 15,474 callers from Maryland to the Lifeline. Of those 15,474 callers, 87% were able to receive help in Maryland. Which means that 1,990 callers from Maryland, were unable to be answered by a local center in Maryland.

Behavioral Health and Crisis Services • Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Services

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www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhs

Suicide rates increased 14% in Maryland from 2009 to 2019. Suicide affects all ages. It is the second leading cause of death for people ages 10-34, the fourth leading cause among people ages 35-44, and the fifth leading cause among people ages 45-54. If properly funded, 988 has the potential to save the lives of citizens of Montgomery County.

Maryland has the unique opportunity to align with national efforts to improve access to crisis care by designating 988 as the number for our state's behavioral health crisis hotline and ensuring adequate funding to support local crisis call centers.

We strongly urge you support this bill and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Helga Luest". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Helga Luest
Chair, Mental Health Advisory Committee