



**HB0812 – Maryland Department of Health - 2-1-1 Maryland - Mental Health Services Phone Call Program**  
Presented to the Hon. Shane Pendergrass and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee  
February 23, 2021 1:30 p.m.

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**POSITION: SUPPORT**

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee to issue a **favorable report on HB0812 – Maryland Department of Health - 2-1-1 Maryland - Mental Health Services Phone Call Program**, sponsored by Delegate Bonnie Cullison.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. As part of our efforts to protect reproductive freedom for all Marylanders, we work to ensure every childbearing individual to decide if, when, and how to form one’s family, and to parent in good health, in safety, and with dignity. In doing so, we support the expansion of mental health services offered by 2-1-1 Maryland which will reduce reliance on police intervention in mental health crises and provide professional support for families and pregnant persons experiencing crises. Mental health illnesses such as depression and anxiety have been exacerbated by COVID-19, and the pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of [pregnant people and new parents](#), especially [Black mothers](#).

Postpartum depression is a serious and debilitating illness that affects [1 in 7](#) people. If left untreated, it can last months and adversely impact child development and increase the likelihood of psychiatric disorders among children.<sup>1</sup> Disparities exist in treatment of postpartum depression, with all low-income parents being left undertreated, especially those from racial minority groups.<sup>2</sup> One of the worst outcomes of postpartum depression is maternal death, and some studies estimate maternal death rates due to suicide or drug overdose are between [14-30%](#) in some areas. For these reasons, access to mental health care is a reproductive justice issue which can be ameliorated by increased services from 2-1-1 Maryland. These services are especially critical for pregnant and post-partum people of color experiencing mental health crises who may face legitimate fear in calling police for assistance. [Police officers](#) should not be first responders to mental health crises because they are not properly trained and qualified to handle these situations, and increase the likelihood of altercation.

Reproductive justice calls for equity in pregnancy decision-making and parenting in good health. Disparities in access to healthcare and unequal treatment by police leave low-income communities and people of color more likely to suffer unnecessarily from mental illnesses. This bill proposes an alternative to involving law enforcement in mental health crises and increases access to mental health care for everyone. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on HB0812**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> Feder, Adriana, et al. “Children of low-income depressed mothers: psychiatric disorders and social adjustment.” *Depression and Anxiety*, vol. 26, 6 (June 2009): 513-20. <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.20522>

<sup>2</sup> Kozhimannil, Katy Backes et al. “Racial and ethnic disparities in postpartum depression care among low-income women.” *Psychiatric services* vol. 62, 6 (2011): 619-25. doi:10.1176/ps.62.6.pss6206\_0619