



February 2, 2022

**Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 293 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—9-8-8 Trust Fund

The Baltimore City Substance Abuse Director (BCSAD) is an advocacy and provider organization comprised of Baltimore City substance use disorder treatment providers representing all levels of care from prevention to residential treatment. Our mission is the promotion of high-quality, best-practice and effective substance use disorders treatment for the citizens of Baltimore City. We are also involved in and support legislation that ensures our citizens get the best possible care through active consideration of legislation as it relates to the health and well-being of our consumer population.

The Baltimore City Substance Abuse Director (BCSAD) is pleased to support HB 293 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.

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.

BCSAD providers urge you to ensure that 9-8-8 funding is sustainable. Providing this valuable and potentially lifesaving service with out funding to sustain it will create a situation where it appears we are able to provide crisis services for those in need, but in actuality falls short and creates apathy and distrust for consumers and providers alike.

Maryland has the unique opportunity to algin 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. **The Baltimore City Substance Abuse Directorate urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 293.**

Respectfully submitted 01/31/2022

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