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MAYOR

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HB 293

February 2, 2022

TO: Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee
FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director of Government Relations
RE: House Bill 293 – Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—9-8-8 Trust Fund

POSITION: Support

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 293.

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 has designated 988 as the new phone number the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This number, for both voice and text will be implemented countrywide beginning in July of 2022. Phone companies will route 988 calls to local crisis hotlines that are a part of the lifeline system. The local crisis calls centers currently provide 24/7 free, confidential emotional support to people calling for help. We are hopeful that utilization of this service will increase as barriers to accessing resources decrease. The funding that this bill is seeking will create sustainable and lasting personnel to match the increased demands for help.

As the local health authority of Baltimore City, our goals surround the implementation of programs and policies that support the physical and behavioral health and wellness of Baltimore City residents. This policy sustains funding for the free, dedicated 988 line and that will provide around-the-clock support for people who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis. This directly reflects the efforts of the Baltimore City Health Department in our city to improve health outcomes for all of our residents.

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 respectfully request a **favorable** report on House Bill 293.

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