



February 2, 2022

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

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

Since 1998, the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E) has created awareness of the deep need for adoption competency in mental health services and has grown to become the national leader providing mental health and child welfare professionals with training and coaching to become adoption competent. Our programs help professionals gain the skills, insight, and experience necessary to serve the needs of the adoption and foster care communities. We have been at the forefront of efforts to identify foster and adopted children and families as a population most at-risk for a mental health crisis and have sought to improve the competency of the workforce through specialized training. Our efforts stem from over a decade experience with specialized adoption-competent mental health services to over 7000 clinical clients and on average over 6800 sessions annually.

The Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) 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.

At C.A.S.E. we recognize the mental health crisis occurring right now in our country and impacting residents in Maryland. We strongly support efforts to provide adequate mental health crisis care. COVID-19 brought a devastating impact on children that came into this pandemic with a history of trauma, loss and grief exacerbated by fear of the pandemic itself, more loss and the reality of isolation from peers, teachers, extended family and other significant supports in their lives. The needs of the foster and adoptive community like others, has risen with youth and families in crisis. We believe this bill has the capacity to assist the vulnerable children, youth, and families in Maryland providing a “safety net “ to turn to when lives are at risk.

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. **The Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 293.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142.