

TO: The Honorable Shane Pendergrass, Chair  
House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Annie Coble  
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Johns Hopkins University and Medicine 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 for 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.

Johns Hopkins Medicine provides behavioral health crisis services to Marylanders throughout the State. Services are provided through our emergency departments and communities services. Seventeen hospitals, along with three local behavioral authorities and community organizations across Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Carroll County and Howard County were awarded a grant as a part of the Greater Baltimore Regional Integrated Crisis System (GBRICS). GBRICS aims to address behavioral health crises through a robust crisis hotline and referral system and increased access to mobile crisis services, which helps to serve individuals in the community instead of through the criminal justice system or hospital emergency departments. 988 is a vital tool for achieving the goals of GBRICS.

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. **Johns Hopkins urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 293.**

cc: Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee