



February 2, 2022

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

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

Mental Health Association (MHA) of Frederick County, a private non-profit in Frederick County, is a primary provider of crisis services in our county. The work of our organization is to support the emotional wellness in our community through preparing resilient children, securing vulnerable families, and standing with those in crisis. MHA of Frederick County is the home of the 988 call center for Western Maryland. We have answered the National Suicide line since 2001.

Mental Health Association of Frederick County 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.

As a provider of this service, we know adequate funding is crucial. We received a \$7,500 annual stipend from the National Suicide Lifeline to provide 24/7 availability for persons in crisis and with thoughts of suicide. The call centers are the foundation of the crisis system structure and provide access to well-trained staff. 90% of calls are handled without additional intervention from more expensive services such as law enforcement or hospital admission. Funding of centers that attracts a quality workforce and highlights the life-saving work that occurs every day is critical.

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. **Mental Health Association of Frederick County urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 293.**

Thank you for your consideration,

Shannon Aleshire, CEO

Mental Health Association of Frederick County

Mental Health Association of Frederick County
226 South Jefferson Street, Frederick MD 21701
301.663.0011, www.fcma.org