

February 2, 2022

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

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

National Association of Social Workers Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) **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.

Many social workers provide services to individuals in crisis. We recognize the need for an accessible crisis hotline system so Marylanders can access services 24/7. This bill is an important first step to ensuring that Maryland has the resources to support the implementation of the 988 system.

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. **NASW-MD urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 293**. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Mary Beth DeMartino, Executive Director, NASW MD (mdemartino.naswmd@socialworkers.org).