



MARYLAND CITIZENS' HEALTH INITIATIVE

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 293**

Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services 9-8-8 Fund

Before the Health and Government Operations Committee

By Stephanie Klapper, Deputy Director, Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative, Inc.

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Chairman Pendergrass and Members of the HGO Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 293. We especially thank Delegate Karen Lewis Young for being the lead sponsor for the bill.

Thanks to federal action, starting in July, 2022 the phone number 988 will become the national Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Hotline. It is critical that Maryland's eight local call centers have the resources they need to provide free, confidential emotional support to Marylanders in crisis, and that Maryland invest in the continuum of behavioral health crisis response services. Without a robust system of behavioral health crisis services, those in distress often go to hospital emergency rooms. Investing in mobile crisis teams, crisis stabilization services, and other acute behavioral health services will help Marylanders in crisis avoid chaotic visits<sup>1</sup> to overtaxed emergency rooms, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. 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 behavior health crisis services. Thanks to your leadership, Maryland has one of the top five health care systems in the entire nation, and HB 293 will help us continue to lead. We urge a favorable report for HB 293.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.baltimoresun.com/health/bs-hs-emergency-behavioral-health-care-20180125-story.html>