

**HB 293**  
**Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund**  
House Government and Operations Committee  
February 2, 2022

**Support**

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports HB 293 which would designate 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.

Inspired by the Gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of Marylanders each year, we recognize the need for crisis behavioral health services in our communities.

Crisis call centers are often the first interaction that people have with the local mental health system. It is critical that it be fully funded and sustainable to connect individuals and families who call with the immediate assistance that they need. They serve as safe places where people seeking support can call 24/7, regardless of their ability to pay for the service or their enrollment in specific programs. They make critical connections for individuals and families to local mental health providers to provide assessments and ongoing services to try and mitigate the need for a law enforcement response.

We have seen the benefit of having a call center through Baltimore City's Health Crisis Hotline which among other duties triages calls for our BCARS program, a crisis program for children and adolescents in Baltimore City. By operating in this way there is an immediate referral for youth and families so that they are not either stuck in the emergency room seeking services outside of the scope of what the hospitals provide or stuck on a wait list for an opening at a local Outpatient Mental Health Clinic (OMHC).

While this hotline is serving an important service for the local area, it's time for Maryland to align with national efforts to improve access to crisis care by designating 988 as the number for the entire state and ensure adequate funding to support local crisis call centers.

**For the reasons listed above, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 293.**

Submitted By: Regan Vaughan, Director of Advocacy