



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony  
HB271 – 988 Trust Fund Funding  
Committee on Health and Government Operations  
February 7, 2023

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Good afternoon Madam Chair and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present House Bill 271 for consideration. The crossfile of this bill (SB3) has already passed the Senate- unanimously! You may have seen it in the news, it was the first bill the Senate passed this year. What does the bill do? HB271 invests \$12 million in the FY 2025 budget bill into the 988 Trust Fund.

The 988 Trust Fund was established last year by this body with legislation sponsored by then Delegate Karen Lewis Young and Senator Augustine. It started with \$5 Million last year, and this year's legislation would invest a much needed additional \$12 Million in this essential service.

The 988 Trust Fund is a non-lapsing fund that supports the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**. The 988 Trust Fund also provides the resources to develop and implement the delivery of behavioral health crisis response services statewide. Prior to the implementation of the 988 Lifeline, behavioral health crisis response resulted, more times than not, in a call to 911 or a visit to a hospital emergency room, options which tend to be less effective for mental health crises and also divert critical resources and care away from other emergencies.

The 988 Lifeline offers free 24/7 supportive counseling and connections to trained resources that can safely de-escalate and resolve crises. The 988 Lifeline provides vital assistance to those experiencing behavioral health crises immediately, rather than waiting days or weeks to get an in-person appointment with a behavioral health specialist. Additionally, 988 trained staff connect individuals with community resources that help maintain stability after the immediate crisis has been addressed.

The 988 Lifeline is being used by more people every day, and it is effective. According to Johns Hopkins, approximately 60% of people brought to the ER with a behavioral health issue are discharged because their crisis does not qualify as needing inpatient care, but they are still in need of assistance. **988 Lifeline addresses this gap in care, providing resolution over the phone to 80% of the calls received.**

The \$12 million appropriation requested by this bill will expand the Lifeline's capacity to serve Marylanders experiencing mental health challenges and bolster the system long-term. It is a wise investment that supports our efforts to improve behavioral health services in our state.

I urge a favorable report.