



February 7, 2023

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**COMMITTEE:** House Health and Government Operations Committee

**BILL:** HB 271 – 988 Trust Fund – Funding

**POSITION:** Support

The Horizon Foundation is Howard County's community health foundation and the largest independent health philanthropy in the state of Maryland. We lead community change so everyone in Howard County can live a longer, better life.

**The Foundation is pleased to support HB 271 – 988 Trust Fund – Funding.**

This bill provides much needed additional funding for the 988 Trust Fund to support reliable planning and capacity building for the Maryland 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline network.

Last year, Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund and dedicated funding for 988 Lifeline providers for essentially the first time. This funding was critical to support Maryland's transition to 988, the first nationwide three-digit access code for suicidal and behavioral health crisis calls and texts. The helplines that make up Maryland's Lifeline network provide free, 24/7 supportive counseling and safety planning to residents for decades, and the increased call volume and visibility associated with the transition to 988 demands new and continued state investment. Maryland communities need mental health and emotional support more than ever and investing in the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a critical way to provide that support.

Significant gaps remain in making emergency crisis services for people with mental health needs more accessible. In Howard County, we continue to see stark racial disparities in mental health, especially among Black and Latino residents. In 2014-2016, suicide was the leading cause of death for youth ages 15-19 in Howard County.<sup>i</sup> Among these youth, young Latina women are most at risk of depression and planning a suicide. Nearly 50% of Latina high schoolers and 42% of multiracial female high schoolers said they felt sad and hopeless in comparison to 23% of White students and 26% of Black students.<sup>ii</sup> Among adults, Black residents are most likely to say they have been "bothered" by "feeling down, depressed or hopeless" and by "having little interest or pleasure in doing things," which are two indicators of risk for depression.<sup>iii</sup>

These rates are startling and reflect larger systemic issues and the need for expanded mental health and behavioral health crisis services – including and beyond 988. Ensuring sustainable funding to support local crisis call centers and other crisis services is critical to meeting the needs of our community members and saving lives.

Maryland has a strong foundation that can be built upon to create the robust 988 network that will keep residents safe and well, but continued investment is needed. The Horizon Foundation urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 271. Thank you for your consideration.

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- i. Howard County Health Department. (2018). Suicide Prevention, Howard County Youth. Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=6nrdbJIH7JI%3d&tabid=1390&portalid=0>
  - ii. Maryland Department of Health, Prevention and Health Promotion Administration. (2016). Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2016, Maryland High School Survey, p. 14. Retrieved from <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/ccdpc/Reports/Documents/2016%20YRBS%20YTS%20Reports/2016HowardHS%20Summary%20Tables.pdf>. Note: The original source for these data (Maryland Department of Health's Youth Risk Behavior Survey) breaks data down by the following categories: White, Black, Hispanic/ Latino, All Other Races and Multiple Races. This explains the lack of information on Asians in this segment of the report. We recognize this lack of differentiation is a common problem with public health statistics and underscores the need for more robust practices in disaggregating available data.
  - iii. OpinionWorks. (2018). 2018 Howard County Health Assessment Survey Data Tables. Unpublished data