



February 3, 2023

House Health and Government Operations Committee  
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

**HB 271 9-8-8 Trust Fund – Funding**

**Chair Peña- Melnyk, Vice Chair Kelly, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,**

Silver Spring Justice Coalition is a coalition of faith groups, advocacy organizations, families of impacted individuals, and community members in Montgomery County, Maryland. SSJC was formed in 2018, after a police officer killed Robert White, a Black man living with mental illness who was taking his daily walk in the park and looked suspicious to a police officer. Our mission is to reduce the presence of police in our communities; eliminate violence and harm by police; establish transparency and accountability; and redirect public funds toward community needs.

Silver Spring Justice Coalition is pleased to support HB 271 9-8-8 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 have been providing free, 24/7 supportive counseling and safety planning to residents for decades. **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.

**Maryland's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is essential to reducing the need for law enforcement to respond when someone is experiencing a mental health crisis.**

988 can help prevent traumatic and sometimes deadly interactions with police and reduce the risk that people in crisis will be criminalized. Overreliance on law enforcement in crisis response has led to inequitable access to care, disproportionate arrest, and incarceration for people of color. 988 is an important part of ending this cycle.

Maryland has a strong foundation upon which to build a robust 988 network that will keep residents safe and well, but continued investment is needed. Silver Spring Justice Coalition urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 271.