



## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 271**

### **9-8-8 Trust Fund--Funding**

Before the House Health and Government Operations Committee

By Sheena Ogee, MSW Fellow, Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative, Inc.

February 7, 2023

Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Kelly, and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 271. We especially thank Delegate Kelly for being the lead sponsor for the bill.

**We are pleased to support HB 271.** I am submitting this testimony on behalf of our individual organization, Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative, Inc., as we have not reviewed this legislation with the full Maryland Health Care for All! Coalition. Our mission is to ensure that all Marylanders have access to quality affordable health care coverage. 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 support more than ever and investing in the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a critical way to provide that support.

I am a University of Maryland Master of Social Work student who interned with Maryland 211 during the peak of the pandemic. This unique opportunity gave me first-hand experience acknowledging and working to support the behavioral health needs facing Maryland's most vulnerable residents. As a young adult and mother of three small children, I profoundly understand that our current social climate is one of intensifying anxiety and limited behavioral health supports, especially for our young people. 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. Thanks to your leadership, Maryland has one of the top five health care systems in the entire nation, and HB 271 will help us continue to lead. **I urge the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 271.**

2600 St. Paul Street Baltimore, MD 21218

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Phone (410)235-9000 Fax (410)235-9000