



February 7, 2023

**House Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 271 988 Trust Fund – Funding

The Black Mental Health Alliance (BMHA) exist to promote a holistic, culturally relevant approach to the development and sustainment of mental health programs and services for African Americans and other persons of color. The Black Mental Health Alliance 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.

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. Why is this so important? The public demand is increasing. The Black Mental Health Alliance encourages the utilization of such a critical resource. CALL 988 is a helpline that offers free and confidential emergency emotional support from mental health specialists, 24/7.

The Black Mental Health Alliance urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass **HB 271 988 Trust Fund – Funding**.