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House Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT
HB 271 988 Trust Fund – Funding

The Jesse Klump Memorial Fund, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit corporation, exists to end the tragedy of suicide, to provide a place of healing for those who have lost loved ones to suicide, and to provide grants for training for healthcare and education professionals dedicated to suicide prevention and mental health.

The Jesse Klump Memorial Fund 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 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.

Within six weeks of the July 2022 date when 988 became active as the National Crisis Lifeline, the crisis response contractor on the Eastern Shore reported a 15% increase in calls vs the previous month. Statewide, lifeline providers saw a 25% increase in 2021 vs. calls with the old number. There could be two reasons for the call increase: 1) more Marylanders were suicidal, and/or 2) it is easier to remember 988 than 1-800-273-8255. But there is another factor to consider. After more than 30 years of 911, stigma about calling any crisis hotline has dramatically decreased. No one would hesitate to call 911 in the case of an emergency. Changing the mental health lifeline to 988 gives the same green light to people struggling with mental health and suicide issues to call for help.

At a time when three in five high school students report struggling with mental health issues, and one in five high school students are considering suicide, (MD-YPBS-21), 988 is a critical tool to save lives. Maryland has a solid foundation to create the robust 988 network that will keep residents safe and well, but continued investment is needed. The Jesse Klump Memorial Fund **urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 271.**

