



HB 271 – 9-8-8 Trust Fund - Funding

Committee: Health and Government Operations

Date: February 7, 2023

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) helps families who care for a loved one with behavioral health needs. Using personal experience, our staff provide one-to-one peer support and navigation services to family members with a child, youth or adult with a mental health, substance use or gambling issue.

MCF strongly supports HB 271.

HB 271 would provide 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.

The need for 988 is greater than ever. The mental health of people has dramatically worsened in the wake of the COVID pandemic. Adults saw an increase in rates of depression from 6% to 25% from 2019 to 2021.¹ Emergency department visits for potential suicidality for youth aged 12-17 increased 39% from 2019 to 2021.² The United States and Maryland are experiencing a mental health crisis, and this is especially true of youth. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics (November 2022). Anxiety and Depression.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (June 2021). Emergency Department Visits for Suspected Suicide Attempts among Persons Aged 12-25 Years Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic – United States, January 2019-May 2021.

Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) joined together to declare a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health. Study after study has documented the worsened mental health of youth since the onset of the COVID pandemic.

Already 988 has been making a difference in people's lives. When the increase in utilization of the suicide lifeline has been measured, significant increases have been found. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline received over 1.7 million calls, texts and chats in its first five months. That's nearly half a million more than the old 10-digit Suicide Prevention Lifeline fielded during the same period the year before.

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.

MCF urges a favorable report on HB 271.

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