



February 7, 2023

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

HB 271 988 Trust Fund – Funding

Mental Health Association (MHA) of Frederick County, a private non-profit in Frederick County, is a primary provider of crisis services in our county. The work of our organization is to support the emotional wellness in our community through preparing resilient children, securing vulnerable families, and standing with those in crisis. MHA of Frederick County is the home of the 988 call center for Western Maryland. We have answered the National Suicide line since 2001.

Mental Health Association of Frederick 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 and 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 additional state investment. Maryland communities need mental health and emotional support more than ever and investing in the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a critical way to provide that support.

As a provider of this service, we know adequate funding is crucial. We received a \$7,500 annual stipend from the National Suicide Lifeline to provide 24/7 availability for persons in crisis and with thoughts of suicide. The call centers are the foundation of the crisis system structure and provide access to well-trained staff. 90% of calls are handled without additional intervention from more expensive services such as law enforcement or hospital admission. Funding of centers that attracts a quality workforce and highlights the life-saving work that occurs every day is critical.

Maryland has the unique opportunity to align with national efforts to improve access to crisis care by designating 988 as the number for our state's behavioral health crisis hotline and ensuring adequate funding to support local crisis call centers. **Mental Health Association of Frederick County urges the Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 271.**

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