

House Bill 271 9-8-8 Trust Fund – Funding
House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 7, 2023
Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 271.

HB 271 provides additional funding for Maryland's 988 Trust Fund.

In 2022 the Maryland General Assembly established the 988 Trust Fund to reimburse for costs associated with designating and maintaining 988 as the new universal telephone number for the state's suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline and for developing and implementing a statewide continuum of behavioral health crisis response services.

Challenges in accessing quality mental health and substance use disorder services in the community results far too often in Marylanders calling police or going to hospital emergency departments when experiencing a behavioral health crisis. These options are rarely the most appropriate or effective way of deescalating a crisis.

Behavioral health crisis response services, on the other hand, are developed and designed specifically to address the unique needs of individuals experiencing a mental health or substance use emergency. They provide services and supports necessary to stabilize the immediate crisis and linkages to community resources that can help maintain that stability.

Maryland's crisis call centers provide free, confidential, 24/7 support and referrals to care for Marylanders in crisis. These centers have seen increased call volumes over the past year as demand for behavioral health services has increased and public awareness about 988 has grown. This requires an additional investment to ensure our call centers have everything they need to effectively handle this influx of new calls.

For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 271 and we urge a favorable report.

For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865