



February 3, 2023

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

HB 271 988 Trust Fund – Funding

The Affiliated Santé Group (Santé) is a leading non-profit provider of behavioral health and Crisis Response Services in the state of Maryland. Santé has provided Crisis Response for over 25 years. Today Santé provides Crisis Response Services in twelve Maryland counties serving thousands of individuals annually. Santé operates Crisis Call Centers; Mobile Crisis Teams; Mobile Response and Stabilization Services for children, youth, and families; In-Home Intervention Teams; Community and First Responder Education; School Intervention Services, and access to behavioral health Urgent Care appointments.

The Affiliated Santé Group 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.

The need for crisis services has clearly increased over the last decade and more intensely in the last 4-5 years. Over the last ten years, the suicide rate has increased and has been exasperated by the pandemic. Of unique concern is the increase among children and adolescents which has risen by 56% (CDC). According to the data released by the CDC in December 2017, suicide is still the tenth leading cause of death and the rate of suicide in 2016 increased by 1.2 percent. In 2015, the last year the CDC released mortality data, there were 44,193 suicide deaths; in 2016 there were 44,965, an increase of 772 additional deaths. The pandemic has only exacerbated the behavioral health crisis creating a significant rise in individuals experiencing behavioral health crisis. Often these individuals simply need a place to call where someone will listen with compassion and provide appropriate referrals to community-based providers. In some instances, individuals in crisis need an emergency response such as Santé's Mobile Crisis Teams. Whatever the need, a single point of access with an easy to remember number and well-trained crisis professionals to provide immediate and compassionate care is essential.

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. **The Affiliated Santé Group urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 271.**