



March 6, 2024

House Ways & Means Committee

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

*HB 1394 - Education - Provision of 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
and Safe Schools Maryland Telephone Numbers*

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports HB 1394 - Education - Provision of 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and Safe Schools Maryland Telephone Numbers. This measure will help ensure students are aware of the 988 helpline and other important phone numbers.

School-aged children need to have full access to mental health and suicide prevention resources. Tragically, suicide and poor mental health have been on the rise since pandemic among young people, and death suicide has been a leading cause of death among middle and high school-aged children for many years. Free, confidential supports can help young people who are struggling and who may feel hesitant to share their distress with their parents or other authority figures.

HB 1394 would add 988 and the Safe Schools Anonymous Tip Line to school identification cards and school handbooks. These resources are critical and should be widely known by students. School identification cards and the school handbook are reasonable places to highlight these numbers and help raise awareness.

Maryland’s 988 network is an important mental health resource that all students should be aware of and comfortable using. **BHSB urges the House Ways & Means Committee to support HB 1394.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142