



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 6, 2024

House Bill 1394

**Education – Provision of 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and Safe Schools
Maryland Telephone Numbers
House Ways and Means Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 1394 requires beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, each county board of education to provide students in grades six through twelve with the telephone numbers of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the Safe Schools Maryland anonymous tip line by printing the telephone numbers prominently in the school handbook and printing the telephone numbers on a student's school identification card, if provided.

Suicide stands as the second leading cause of death among individuals aged 10-34.¹ Given the widespread availability of mobile phones among school-going youth, accessing help during emotional distress has become more feasible through a simple three-digit number. When this three-digit number is prominently displayed on handbooks and student ID cards, it ensures greater accessibility to life-saving services. In January 2024 alone, a total of 447,413 calls, chats, and texts were directed to crisis counselors, with an average answer rate of 91%.² Trained counselors respond to individuals, offering a listening ear, understanding their problems, providing support, and sharing resources as needed. Peers are also essential in spreading this information, and it is effective to display the number within schools for easy sharing among friends who might be going through difficult times.

For middle and high school-aged youth, who are particularly vulnerable to life changes, prioritizing their emotional well-being becomes crucial for them to achieve future goals.

¹[https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus/topics/suicide.htm#:~:text=Suicide%20is%20a%20significant%20cause,Table%20LCOdAge\)%20](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus/topics/suicide.htm#:~:text=Suicide%20is%20a%20significant%20cause,Table%20LCOdAge)%20)

² <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/performance-metrics>

Ensuring the easy availability of the 988 number is a step towards safeguarding their mental health. Every child, created in the image and likeness of God, deserves the opportunity to lead a fulfilling life with ample support and reassurance that their lives are valuable.

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **HB 1394**.

Thank you for your consideration.