



March 25, 2025

**House Appropriations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

SB 599 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program - Funding

The Black Mental Health Alliance for Education and Consultation, Inc., (BMHA,) exist to promote a holistic, culturally relevant approach to the development and sustainment of mental health programs and services for African Americans and other persons of color. The Black Mental Health Alliance is pleased to support Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988.

The Black Mental Health Alliance strongly supports SB599 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program – Funding. This bill will provide level funding to the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program for the next three years to maintain critical behavioral health care services.

The Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program was established in 2019 to build a more robust behavioral health crisis response system. These types of services provide immediate support when someone is experiencing a behavioral health crisis. Crisis services such as mobile crisis teams, urgent care clinics, and crisis residential beds are essential components of the behavioral health care continuum and provide an important alternative to calling 911 or going to the hospital Emergency Department.

The General Assembly mandated \$5 million for the last four years and the Behavioral Health Administration indicated that they plan to maintain it at this level for FY26. This stable funding has been used effectively to serve thousands of children and adults experiencing a crisis. It is also a smart investment that saves the state money in the long run by preventing higher hospital and criminal justice costs. The services funded by this program must be maintained to divert people away from these more expensive settings, especially considering the struggles the state continues to have with pediatric hospital overstay and lengthy Emergency Department wait times.

Why is this so important? The public demand is increasing. Through outreach campaigns the Black Mental Health Alliance together with organizations and individuals statewide encourages the utilization of such a critical resource. CALL 988 is a helpline that offers free and confidential emergency emotional support from mental health specialists, 24/7, to Maryland residents dealing with mental health emergencies. Maryland has a strong foundation that must be maintained. Our robust 988 network keeps residents safe and well, but continued investment is needed.

Continuing funding for the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program is a smart investment. The Black Mental Health Alliance **urges the House Appropriations Committee to consider this Senate bill and pass SB599.**