

January 15, 2025

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and esteemed members of the Budget and Tax Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a non-profit that is dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

In 2022, Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund to provide dedicated funding for 988—but no permanent funding source was established at that time. Last year, the General Assembly passed SB974, which created a permanent funding mechanism through a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee, which is modeled after Maryland's current 911 funding structure. That dedicated funding is essential to meet increasingly strict federal 988 standards and ensure Marylanders can access 988 for lifesaving counselling and support when they need it. NAMI Maryland was proud to support SB974 in the 2024 session.

SB36 would authorize the use of 911 Trust Fund dollars for costs related to the operation of the 988 suicide prevention hotline when there is overlap in the two—for example, software interfaces and joint trainings. Since 988 is a relatively new hotline, there is still much overlap in individuals who call 911 seeking mental health crisis support services, as opposed to 988. Authorizing the 911 Trust Fund to be utilized for costs related to 988 (so long as they are also related to 911) allows for better funding, training, and systems.

There are 781,000 Marylanders with a mental health condition and 181,000 with a serious mental illness. A priority of NAMI MD is to ensure adequate funding to support programs to reach this target population. The goal of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is to provide immediate crisis intervention and support.

NAMI MD is committed to advancing efforts to improve crisis response in our State. Funding 988 is the first step. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

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