



ON OUR OWN
OF MARYLAND

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 3: 988 Trust Fund - Funding

Thank you Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and committee members for improving the quality and accessibility of healthcare services for Marylanders. On Our Own of Maryland (OOOMD) is a statewide behavioral health (BH) education and advocacy organization, operating for 30 years by and for people with lived experience of mental health and substance use challenges. Our network of 20+ affiliated peer-operated Wellness & Recovery Centers throughout the state offer free, voluntary recovery support services to nearly 6,500 community members with mental health and substance use challenges.

We strongly support Senate Bill 3, which provides necessary funding to make the national 988 hotline and associated services the more effective, less traumatizing alternative to dialing 911 for behavioral health crises.

Delivering crisis response services in a timely and trauma-informed manner requires adequate resources to maintain strong infrastructure. This bill provides necessary funding for 988-responsive services to maintain staffing levels, training standards, and functional technology for real-time coordination and effective intervention.

988 creates opportunities to resolve BH crisis situations through voluntary, supportive, and cost-effective options such as phone counseling, mobile response teams, and walk-in clinics. However, 988 call centers cannot offer or connect individuals in distress with community services that don't exist or aren't available 24/7 due to a lack of stable or adequate funding. This bill bolsters both the 988 call centers as well as a continuum of crisis support services: Mobile Crisis Teams, Crisis Stabilization Centers, and other acute behavioral healthcare services.

Dedicating funding to support these community-based services decreases reliance on law enforcement as the default available responder for BH crisis scenarios, with important immediate and long-term positive impact for individuals and families. Too often, we hear people report frightening, unhelpful, and stigmatizing experiences due to non-specialty emergency responders' lack of understanding or skill. These bad experiences not only hurt or harm in the moment, but they create lasting mistrust and resistance to engaging with crisis services in the future.

On Our Own of Maryland strongly urges you to support SB 3's critical investment in our crisis response system, to make sure all Marylanders receive quality, effective, respectful, and real-time support when seeking help in their most vulnerable and difficult times. Thank you.