

March 21, 2023

House Health and Government Operations Committee

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

SB 3 988 Trust Fund – Funding

The Fund MD988 Campaign represents over 70 Maryland organizations committed to securing dedicated funding to support the Maryland 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline network and the full continuum of behavioral health crisis services. The Campaign includes hospitals, first responders, mental health advocates, local governments, philanthropy, and other community-based organizations. Please visit www.fundmd988.org/partners for a full list of endorsing partners.

The Fund MD988 Campaign is pleased to support SB 3 988 Trust Fund – Funding. This bill provides much needed additional funding for the 988 Trust Fund to support reliable planning and capacity building for Maryland to invest in its 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline network.

Last year, Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund and dedicated funding for 988 Lifeline providers for the first time. This funding was critical to support Maryland's transition to 988, the first nationwide three-digit access code for suicidal and behavioral health crisis calls and texts. The helplines that make up Maryland's Lifeline network provide free, 24/7 supportive counseling and safety planning to residents for decades, and the increased call volume and visibility associated with the transition to 988 demands new and continued state investment. Maryland communities need mental health and emotional support more than ever and investing in the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a critical way to provide that support.

Having a high-functioning and robust 988 network is essential to communities and organizations across Maryland. 988 helplines provide an alternative to 911 and more disruptive interventions for individuals experiencing emotional distress. Hospital emergency department (ED) and law enforcement patrol officers are not the venues and professionals best suited to respond to behavioral health crises. Saving these critical emergency resources for medical and public safety emergencies where they are most effective is important to all Marylanders.

At a time when our communities, and especially our young people, are struggling, it is a priority for all of us to invest in mental health support. Maryland has a strong foundation that can be built upon, but continued investment in the Maryland 988 network is needed. **The Fund MD988 Campaign urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass SB 3.**

For more information, please email MD988@bhsbaltimore.org