

February 28, 2024

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

SB 974 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees

Community Crisis Services, Inc. is pleased to support SB 974 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees. This bill establishes a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund to sustain and strengthen 988 mental health helpline services in Maryland.

Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund in 2022 to provide dedicated funding for 988, but no permanent funding source was established at that time. Instead, federal grants and state general revenue funds have supported Maryland's 988 launch. These state and federal funds run out next year. Maryland's 988 network needs a permanent funding source to address this fiscal cliff.

SB 974 would create this permanent funding mechanism through a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee modeled after Maryland's current 911 funding structure. This would generate \$15-20 million annually to support current 988 operations, investments in new technology, and targeted service expansions. This dedicated funding is essential to meet increasingly strict federal 988 standards and ensure Marylanders can access 988 for lifesaving counseling and support when they need it.

Community Crisis Services, Inc. has been a provider of crisis hotline/suicide prevention services for over 50 years. Community Crisis Services, Inc. was one of the first hotlines to become part of the 9-8-8 Network when it was founded over 25 years ago. This service provides life-saving, resource-connecting services for individuals whose lives may be hanging by a thread 24 hours every day/365 days every year. Individuals can speak about anything they want. They can speak anonymously and work to solve their behavioral and substance use crises in their own ways. These services provide critically needed mental health services to individuals in the moments needed.

Community Crisis Services, Inc. urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.