



February 28, 2024

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

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

The Black Mental Health Alliance (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 SB 974 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services 988 Trust Fund Fees.

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. HB 933 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.

This Bill provides much needed permanent funding for reliable planning, capacity building, and sustainment of the Maryland 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline network. This funding is critical to support Maryland's 988 Helpline, the first nationwide three-digit access code for suicidal and behavioral health crisis calls and texts. This funding for Maryland's helpline will continue providing crisis intervention to Maryland residents free of cost, 24/7, through supportive counseling by mental health professionals trained to engage the ever increasing call volume. Maryland communities need mental health and emotional support more than ever and investing in the 988 Suicide & Crisis Helpline is a critical way to provide that support.

The Black Mental Health Alliance urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.