



February 28, 2024

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

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

I am writing as the Chair of Nexus Montgomery Regional Partnership, a joint venture among Montgomery County's six hospitals. Nexus Montgomery's mission is to promote health, reduce avoidable hospital utilization, and manage the total cost of care for our shared community in ways that no single hospital could achieve on its own.

Since Nexus Montgomery was formed in 2016, we have worked to increase Montgomery County's behavioral health treatment capacity and strengthen county-wide crisis response. For example, Nexus Montgomery provided start-up funds to establish two crisis bed houses and an Assertive Community Treatment team and helped outpatient mental health centers improve access to post-hospitalization psychiatric care. We also collaborate to reduce avoidable emergency department (ED) utilization among patients with the most complex behavioral health needs.

Nexus Montgomery Regional Partnership 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 the 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.

A sustainably funded 988 system is critical to support Nexus Montgomery's behavioral health crisis work and reduce avoidable behavioral health-related ED utilization. Most callers' needs can be addressed directly during their call or text to 988, and they can be referred to appropriate ambulatory services to meet their behavioral health needs. Without a robust, sustainably funded 988 system, patients experiencing a behavioral health crisis will end up in hospital EDs, which are not equipped to meet their needs. This will contribute to ED overcrowding and long wait times, which negatively impact all patients and ED staff.



Nexus Montgomery Regional Partnership urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Annice Cody'.

Annice Cody, President, Holy Cross Health Network, and
Chair, Nexus Montgomery Regional Partnership

Member Hospitals:

- Adventist HealthCare Shady Grove Medical Center
- Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center
- Holy Cross Hospital
- Holy Cross Germantown Hospital
- MedStar Montgomery Medical Center
- Suburban Hospital (Johns Hopkins Medicine)