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

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

I am Celia Serkin, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc. (MC Federation of Families), a family peer support organization serving diverse families in Montgomery County who have children, youth, and/or young adults with mental health, substance use, or co-occurring challenges. Our Certified Family Peer Specialists are parents who have raised or are currently raising children with mental health, substance use, and/or co-occurring challenges. I am a Montgomery County resident. I have two children, now adults. My son has severe depression. My daughter has co-occurring challenges.

MC Federation of Families 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.

988 is critically important to parents and other primary caregivers who love or care for someone with a mental health, substance use, or co-occurring challenge. 988 is a resource that saves lives. It reduces suicide risk. 988 serves as an important alternative to emergency departments, 911, or law enforcement for behavioral health interventions. 988 is available around the clock, 365 days a year for anyone who needs help or just needs to talk. The Maryland 988 network received over 50,000 calls in the last year. As many as 90% of 988 callers get relief over the phone through supportive counseling and a connection to community resources. Only 2% of callers require a transfer to 911 for active rescue by EMS or law enforcement. Texts to 988 increased fourteen-fold in Maryland since launch.

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Maryland's 988 is needed now more than ever. Having sustainable funding for 988 is essential.

- Calls to 988 have increased almost 50% since it launched and are expected to continue to increase as more people become familiar with 988. *(Source: Maryland 988 data)*
- Texts to 988 increased over 14-fold, but only three of eight Maryland call centers accept texts. *(Source: Maryland 988 data)*
- Maryland has the highest Emergency Department wait times in the country. Strong 988 capacity and other crisis services can help prevent unnecessary trips to the Emergency Department. *(Source: CMS)*
- Suicide rates are rising. In Maryland, 620 people died by suicide in 2021 while almost 76,000 Maryland young people and 200,000 adults had serious thoughts of suicide. *(Source: CDC and SAMHSA)*
- Young people are struggling. Youth feelings of depression and anxiety doubled during the pandemic.
- Nationwide, 42% of high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and 18% made a plan to commit suicide. *(Source: Surgeon General Youth MH Advisory and CDC)*
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MC Federation of Families urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.