

TO: The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair
Budget and Taxation Committee

SB974

Favorable

FROM: Jeanette Ortiz Esq., Deputy Director
Maryland Government Affairs

DATE: February 28, 2024

RE: SB974 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees

Johns Hopkins University and Medicine is pleased to **support SB974 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 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.

In 2022, Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund to provide dedicated funding for 988, however a permanent funding source was not established at that time. The launch of Maryland's 988 has been funded by federal grants and State general revenue funds. However, these State and federal funds will expire in 2025. As a result, Maryland's 988 network needs a permanent funding source to address this fiscal cliff.

SB974 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.

Johns Hopkins Medicine provides behavioral health crisis services to Marylanders throughout the State. Services are provided through our emergency departments and community services. Johns Hopkins hospitals also participate in the Greater Baltimore Regional Integrated Crisis System (GBRICS). GBRICS participants include 17 hospitals, three local behavioral authorities as well as community organizations across Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Carroll County, and Howard County. GBRICS aims to address behavioral health crises through a robust crisis hotline and referral system and increased access to mobile crisis services, which help to serve individuals in the community instead of through the criminal justice system or hospital emergency departments. The 988 network is a vital tool for achieving the goals of GBRICS.

The need for expanded crisis services support is demonstrated by the volume of people brought to hospital emergency departments via an emergency petition. Approximately 60% of individuals brought to a hospital emergency department via an emergency petition are discharged. While they do are not in need of inpatient care, they are in crisis and in need of assistance and services. Expanded crisis services such as 988 can help meet these needs. For example, 80% of calls made to 988 are resolved over the phone.

Maryland should protect this valuable, lifesaving resource by ensuring a dedicated funding source for the 988 Trust Fund. Accordingly, Johns Hopkins respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report on **SB974**.