

**TO:** Committee on Budget and Taxation, Maryland Senate

**FROM:** Henry J. Meiser, [henry.meiser@gmail.com](mailto:henry.meiser@gmail.com), 240-925-0600

**RE:** Senate Bill 974 – Favorable

Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice-Chair, and Member of the Committee

My name is Henry Meiser, and I have had the privilege of previously being designated as the Student Representative of the State Commission on Suicide Prevention, and currently serve on the Board of Director for Community Crisis Services, Inc. which handles all 988 calls for the Southern Maryland Region, and supplements many other regions/states. I come to you today to move a favorable report on Senate Bill 974 (SB974), Behavioral Health Crisis Response – 988 Trust Fund.

Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund in 2022 to provide dedicated funding for 988, but a permanent funding source was not 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. Funding for 988 operations is crucial and should not be overlooked.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 974 from this Committee.



**Henry J. Meiser**

*Executive Director, US Coalition for Safer Schools*

*Former Student Representative, Commission on Suicide Prevention (2020-2023)*

*Former Student Representative, Maryland Center for School Safety Subcabinet*