

February 28, 2024

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

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

My name is Tesia Shi, and I'm a current resident of North Potomac and a Maryland native. As someone who has used 988 and a former volunteer, **I am 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.

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.

988 helped me during a low point in my mental health in senior year of high school. I was having thoughts of suicide every week, but my support systems were not necessarily always available to help. During one particularly low moment, I used the 988 chat and phone line and was subsequently connected with someone. We spoke for an hour, and I believe having an empathetic human at the end of the line helped me get through that moment.

Therefore, I urge the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.