

Nexus Montgomery SB974.pdf

Uploaded by: Algina Kurlys-Rossoll

Position: FAV



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)

SB 974_988 telecom fee_Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Taylor

Position: FAV



Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States, Inc
2101 East Jefferson Street
Rockville, Maryland 20852

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West, Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SB 974 – Support

Dear Chair Guzzone and Members of the Committee:

Kaiser Permanente is pleased to support SB 974, “Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees.” Kaiser Permanente is the largest private integrated health care delivery system in the United States, delivering health care to over 12 million members in eight states and the District of Columbia.¹ Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic States, which operates in Maryland, provides and coordinates complete health care services for over 825,000 members. In Maryland, we deliver care to approximately 475,000 members.

Maryland’s 988 helplines are a critical and effective resource to keep Marylanders experiencing mental health crises safe and supported. The General Assembly established the Maryland 988 Trust Fund to provide ongoing funding and investments for 988 helplines but has not identified a dedicated funding source. One option that Maryland leaders should consider is establishing a 988 telecom fee to provide dependable and predictable funding to the 988 Trust Fund and the essential services it supports.

A telecom fee of at least \$0.25 per month, per line to provide dependable and predictable funding to the Maryland 988 Trust Fund. A 988 telecom fee of \$0.25 would generate approximately \$15-20 million annually that can support ongoing funding for 988 helplines, key helpline investments, and startup funds for targeted crisis service expansion. This funding mechanism would give the 988 and crisis response system adequate funding with which to plan and relieve pressure on general revenue funds at minimal cost to Marylanders.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please feel free to contact me at Allison.W.Taylor@kp.org or (202) 924-7496 with questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Allison Taylor".

Allison Taylor
Director of Government Relations
Kaiser Permanente

¹ Kaiser Permanente comprises Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc., the nation’s largest not-for-profit health plan, and its health plan subsidiaries outside California and Hawaii; the not-for-profit Kaiser Foundation Hospitals, which operates 39 hospitals and over 650 other clinical facilities; and the Permanente Medical Groups, self-governed physician group practices that exclusively contract with Kaiser Foundation Health Plan and its health plan subsidiaries to meet the health needs of Kaiser Permanente’s members.

EveryMind SB974 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Alyssa Sanders

Position: FAV

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

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

Good afternoon, Chairman Guzzone and esteemed members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee. My name is Ann Mazur, and I am the CEO of EveryMind, a nonprofit organization with over 65 years of dedicated experience providing vital mental health education and support services to communities across Maryland.

EveryMind is proud to be one of Maryland's 8 Call Centers, answering the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline since 2005, now the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, and offering text and chat services since 2012.

SB 974 proposes to establish a critical and sustainable funding mechanism for this work. through a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee, modeled after Maryland's successful 911 funding structure.

This funding is essential to support a wide range of critical activities, including comprehensive training for call center staff, technological infrastructure updates, and capacity expansion to meet the anticipated increase in contact volume. Moreover, funds are crucial to supporting outreach and education efforts to raise awareness about the 988 number and its availability to those in need.

Sustainable funding is imperative for EveryMind to continue recruiting Crisis Hotline Counselors and ensuring adequate compensation and wellness support for these positions. While we still rely on volunteers and part-time staff, having full-time counselors ensures more stable and consistent coverage. Our answer rate for 988 calls was an impressive 90-95% for the first half of FY24.

Additionally, this funding is essential to maintaining our comprehensive onboarding training for new Crisis Hotline Counselors. With this funding, we can provide longer and more robust training to our staff, resulting in a training completion rate of 100% for the first time in October 2023. Furthermore, our retention rate for counselors doubled when comparing the first six months of 2023 to the second six months of the calendar year.

This funding is vital to ensure our new cloud-based phone system remains state-of-the-art, guaranteeing its reliability and providing EveryMind with vital insight into call volume and service level data.

This funding enables EveryMind Hotline leadership to collaborate with local crisis service providers, such as Montgomery County Crisis Center and 911 Dispatch, improving the experience for those who need follow-up support.

Lastly, this funding will help us sustain a Hotline management team dedicated specifically to quality assurance, training, and workforce management. These efforts are crucial for monitoring and ensuring higher quality service.

EveryMind urges the **Senate Budget and Taxation Committee** to support SB 974, as it will save lives. Thank you for your time.

SB0974_MHAMD_Fav.pdf

Uploaded by: Ann Geddes

Position: FAV

Senate Bill 974 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 988 Trust Fund

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

February 28, 2024

Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of SB 974.

SB 974 creates a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund by establishing a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee.

988 is a critical and potentially lifesaving statewide resource for individuals in need of mental health support, as well as their families, and it is a key part of the crisis services continuum of care. Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund in 2022 to provide dedicated funding for 988. Federal grants and state general revenue funds have supported Maryland's 988's launch. These state and federal funds run out next year, while calls and texts to 988 have increased dramatically and continue to grow. Maryland's 988 network needs a permanent funding source.

For children and youth who are experiencing mental health distress or a crisis, 988 is especially important to prevent trips to the emergency department and inpatient hospitalizations, both of which can be extremely detrimental to a child's mental health (and are often unnecessary).¹ And 988 is needed now more than ever by Maryland's youth.

For over a decade the mental health of children and youth has been worsening. In the 10 years leading up to the COVID pandemic, depression increased by about 40% in young people,² and the mental health of youth deteriorated dramatically in the wake of the pandemic. Maryland youth have not been immune to these trends. Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 2021-22 shows that 29% of Maryland high school students and 23% of middle school students reported that their mental health was not good most of the time or always.³

¹ Michael A. Hoge et al. Emergency department use by children and youth with mental health conditions: a health equity agenda. *Community Mental Health Journal* (2022). Accessed February 25, 2024.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8762987/>

² Kids' mental health is in crisis. Here's what psychologists are doing to help. American Academy of Pediatrics. January 1, 2023. Accessed January 14, 2023. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/01/trends-improving-youth-mental-health>

³ Maryland Department of Health releases 2021-2022 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey and Youth Tobacco Survey data. Maryland Department of Health. March 3, 2023. Accessed January 14, 2023. <https://health.maryland.gov/newsroom/Pages/Maryland-Department-of-Health-releases-2021-2022-Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey-and-Youth-Tobacco-Survey-data.aspx#:~:text=More%20than%20one%2Dthird%20of,or%20always.%20Female%20students%20were>

For more information, please contact Ann Geddes at (443) 926-3396

Historically, families have called 911 or taken their child to the emergency department when they felt that their child was experiencing a mental health crisis. The worsening mental health of children has led to an explosion in hospital emergency department utilization, which has resulted in children and adolescents becoming stuck there.⁴ Yet most of the time, when a family reaches out for help, their child does not need to be seen in an emergency department or hospitalized, unless there is an accompanying medical emergency.

By calling 988, instead of calling 911 or going to the emergency department, families can access appropriate mental health assistance over the phone, and, if needed, have a mobile crisis team dispatched to them. This is usually sufficient and far preferable for everyone.

In addition, children and youth themselves can call 988 to talk to someone and potentially avert a crisis. Even better, they can text 988 (Maryland needs greater capacity for this, however), which is the preferred way of communicating for many youth.

988 is a vital component of community health and wellbeing. As such, it needs an adequate and dedicated funding source. A \$0.25 telecom fee is a sensible way to support this critical community service.

For this reason, MHAMD supports SB 974 and urges a favorable report.

⁴ The Baltimore Banner. Maryland kids in distress are being kept in emergency departments for weeks, months. (August 9, 2023). Accessed February 13, 2023. <https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/community/public-health/hundreds-of-maryland-children-live-in-hospitals-FCLWTVRAZFARHKCP74RP5EFJNQ/>

SB 974_PJC_Favorable_BT.pdf

Uploaded by: Ashley Black

Position: FAV



Ashley Woolard, Staff Attorney
Public Justice Center
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Woolarda@publicjustice.org

SB 974
Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees
Hearing of The Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
February 28, 2023
1:00 PM

SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. **PJC strongly supports SB 974**, which would establish a stable funding source for the 9-8-8 Trust Fund and strengthen 9-8-8 mental health helpline services in Maryland.

We thank the Maryland General Assembly for passing SB 241 (2022) which established the 9-8-8 Trust Fund and helped ensure that when 9-8-8 went live as the designated official phone number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis would have an easy pathway to local crisis services. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting isolation and job loss created an increased need for on-demand behavioral health crisis services for children and adults in Maryland and a nationwide increase in calls to crisis hotlines. Although mental illness impacts all races, ethnicities and other identities, research supports that people of color and individuals identifying as LGBTQ are disproportionately impacted.¹ Similarly, substance use disorder is increasing among low-income individuals.

Maryland cannot effectively meet the needs of adults and children in crisis without sustainable funding for crisis response services. If passed, SB 974 would create permanent funding through a \$0.25 per month 9-8-8 telecom fee modeled after Maryland's current 911 funding structure. Increasing the availability of these services

¹ Though 21% of all adults in the United States experience a 12-month prevalence of any mental illness, American Native or Alaska Native (19%), Hispanic or Latinx (18%), Woolard (17%), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders (17%) and Asian (14%) adults experience a 12-month prevalence of any mental illness compared to white adults (22%). 44% of lesbian, gay and bisexual adults experience a 12-month prevalence of any mental illness. NAMI, *You Are Not Alone Statistics* (2020), https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI_YouAreNotAlone_2020_FINAL.pdf.

and ensuring access through a small fee would help children and adults receive the care they need in the community and avoid unnecessary hospitalization.

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **SB 974**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Woolard at 410-625-9409 ext. 224 or Woolarda@publicjustice.org.

MCF-SB 974 Testimony-FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Ashley Tauler

Position: FAV



February 28, 2024

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

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

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) is a statewide nonprofit organization that provides family peer support services at no cost to families who have a loved one with a mental health, substance use, or problem gambling disorder. Using their personal experience as parents, caregivers and other loved ones, our staff provide emotional support, resource connection and systems navigation as well as support groups and educational trainings and workshops.

Maryland Coalition 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.

Last year Maryland Coalition of Families served over 4,600 Families and nearly 70% were families with children. 988 is an essential lifesaving resource and support our families utilize.

Maryland Coalition of Families urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.

SB 974 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services

Uploaded by: Carlos Mackall

Position: FAV



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

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

Totally Linking Care in Maryland (TLC-MD) is a nonprofit coalition of 6 hospitals that connects healthcare providers and programs with residents in Southern Maryland (Calvert County, Charles County, Prince George’s County, and St. Mary’s County). We believe that everyone deserves access to quality healthcare.

We build innovative health programs through grant funding and sustain them through public/private partnerships. Our goal is to simplify how residents access healthcare, one program at a time, to help them become the healthiest version of themselves. We do this by breaking down barriers to health care services and building bridges between hospitals, healthcare professionals, faith-based organizations, and, most importantly, the residents of our community.

Totally Linking Care in Maryland (TLC-MD) 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.

This telecom fee will support sustainability for a service that is vital for the State of Maryland. This bill is important to TLC-MD for several reasons. TLC-MD is leading the implementation of the crisis continuum in Prince George’s County that includes 911, 988, Mobile Response, Crisis Stabilization, and Outpatient Services. In most cases 988 will be the entry /first point of contact for individuals who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis. 988 call specialists will stabilize, refer, facilitate services being delivered to individuals in crisis and connect them to the most appropriate level of care. 988 helps reduce costs for the State of Maryland, by often diverting individuals in crisis from higher levels of care. 988 is best practice for behavioral health crisis services in the United States, and Maryland deserves the best practice.

Totally Linking Care in Maryland (TLC-MD) urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.

MC Federation of Families Testimony 2024 SB 974- 9

Uploaded by: Celia Serkin

Position: FAV



Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc.
Colesville Professional Center
13321 New Hampshire Avenue, Terrace B
Silver Spring, MD 20904
301-879-5200 (phone number)
301-879-0012 (fax number)
info@mcfof.org (email)
www.mcfof.org (website)

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

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

February 28, 2024

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.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/618d29f06b02e03d1306c9d1/t/65a1b539a7aa24361102554c/1705096505472/02+988-aboutthelifeline-011224.pdf>

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)*
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/618d29f06b02e03d1306c9d1/t/65c2479e99ce85417ca7ce0e/1707231134967/02+9880FACTSHEET-020524.pdf>

MC Federation of Families urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.

BMHA Hearing Testimony SB974 Feb 28 2024.pdf

Uploaded by: Cheryl Maxwell

Position: FAV



February 28, 2024

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

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

The Black Mental Health Alliance (BMHA) exist to promote a holistic, culturally relevant approach to the development and sustainment of mental health programs and services for African Americans and other persons of color. The Black Mental Health Alliance is pleased to support SB 974 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services 988 Trust Fund Fees.

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.

This Bill provides much needed permanent funding for reliable planning, capacity building, and sustainment of the Maryland 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline network. This funding is critical to support Maryland's 988 Helpline, the first nationwide three-digit access code for suicidal and behavioral health crisis calls and texts. This funding for Maryland's helpline will continue providing crisis intervention to Maryland residents free of cost, 24/7, through supportive counseling by mental health professionals trained to engage the ever increasing call volume. Maryland communities need mental health and emotional support more than ever and investing in the 988 Suicide & Crisis Helpline is a critical way to provide that support.

The Black Mental Health Alliance urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.

SB0974_FAV_GWSCSW_BH Crisis Response Serv. - 9-8-8

Uploaded by: Christine Krone

Position: FAV



Greater Washington Society for Clinical Social Work

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

FROM: Judith Gallant, LCSW-C, Director, GWSCSW Legislation and Advocacy

DATE: February 28, 2024

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 974 – *Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees*

The Greater Washington Society for Clinical Social Work (GWSCSW) was established in 1975 to promote and advance the specialization of clinical practice within the social work profession. Through our lobbying, education, community building, and social justice activities, we affirm our commitment to the needs of those in our profession, their clients, and the community at large. On behalf of GWSCSW, we **support** Senate Bill 974.

This bill establishes a permanent funding source for the 9-8-8 Trust Fund to sustain and strengthen 9-8-8 mental health helpline services in Maryland. Maryland established the 9-8-8 Trust Fund in 2022 to provide dedicated funding for 9-8-8, but no permanent funding source was established at that time. Instead, federal grants and state general revenue funds have supported Maryland's 9-8-8 launch. These state and federal funds run out next year. Maryland's 9-8-8 network needs a permanent funding source to address this fiscal cliff.

Senate Bill 974 would create this permanent funding mechanism through a \$0.25 per month 9-8-8 telecom fee modeled after Maryland's current 9-1-1 funding structure. This would generate \$15-20 million annually to support current 9-8-8 operations, investments in new technology, and targeted service expansions. This dedicated funding is essential to meet increasingly strict federal 9-8-8 standards and ensure Marylanders can access 9-8-8 for lifesaving counseling and support when they need it. **We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 974.**

For more information call:

Christine K. Krone
Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
Danna L. Kauffman
410-244-7000

Greater Washington Society for Clinical Social Work: www.gwscsw.org

Contacts: Director, Legislation & Advocacy Program: Judy Gallant, LCSW-C; email: judy.gallant@verizon.net; mobile (301) 717-1004
Legislative Consultants: Christine K. Krone and Pamela Metz Kasemeyer, Schwartz, Metz, Wise & Kauffman, PA,
20 West Street, Annapolis, MD 21401

Email: ckrone@smwpa.com; mobile (410) 940-9165 ; pmetz@smwpa.com; mobile (410) 746-9003

2024-02-28 - MD - Pyramid Healthcare - Testimony r

Uploaded by: Collan Rosier

Position: FAV



Pyramid Healthcare
AN INTEGRATED BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

CORPORATE OFFICE
P.O. Box 967
Duncansville, PA 16635
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pyramidhc.com

February 28, 2024

Delivered Via [MyMGA Witness Signup Platform](#)

The Hon. Guy Guzzone, Chair
Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Maryland General Assembly
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Hon. Jim Rosapepe, Vice Chair
Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Maryland General Assembly
101 James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Pyramid Healthcare Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 974, An Act Concerning Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9–8–8 Trust Fund Fees

Dear Chairman Guzzone, Vice Chairman Rosapepe, and members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

The Pyramid Healthcare, Inc. (“Pyramid Healthcare”) family of companies is providing testimony below in support of Senate Bill 974, which would establish a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund to sustain and strengthen 988 mental health helpline services in Maryland.

Pyramid Healthcare is an integrated behavioral healthcare system serving Medicaid and commercial clients in 9 states across a continuum of residential and outpatient substance abuse, mental health, autism, and eating disorder treatment services. We employ over 3,600 team members across our 80+ active facilities which treat approximately 12,000 clients on any given day.

In Maryland, we operate four locations: a detox & residential and an outpatient treatment center in California, a detox and residential treatment center in Charlotte Hall, and a detox & residential treatment center in Joppa. In total, we have approximately 170 substance use disorder residential treatment beds for adult Medicaid clients across the state. We are currently under construction on our new Prince George’s facility and expected to begin operations in mid-2024 with approximately 75 detox and residential substance use treatment beds for adults with substance use disorder. That facility will be located in outside of Bowie and will serve the residents of Prince George’s County, Anne Arundel County, and throughout central 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.

Please consider this feedback and pass this bill out of Committee. Thank you for your support of mental health, behavioral health, and substance use providers in Maryland and for considering my requests on behalf of Pyramid Healthcare. If we can provide any additional information or materials, please contact me at crosier@pyramidhc.com or 667-270-1582. In addition, we invite you or a member of the Committee or staff to reach out and schedule a visit to one of our Maryland locations sometime soon to learn more about our programs and services.

Sincerely,



Collan B. Rosier
Vice President of Government Relations

**CC: Members, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Kimberly J. Landry, Committee Manager**

SB 974_988 Telecom Fee_FAVORABLE.pdf

Uploaded by: Dan Rabbitt

Position: FAV



February 28, 2024

**Senate Budget & Tax Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

SB 974 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore strongly supports SB 974 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees. This bill establishes a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee to provide reliable funding for Maryland’s 988 helplines. This approach, modeled after 911’s funding mechanism, will strengthen and expand 988 services to support all Marylanders experiencing behavioral health crisis.

Maryland’s communities have struggled with mental health in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. More Marylanders are dying due to suicide and overdose than ever before. Almost 200,000 Maryland adults seriously consider suicide each year which is about 50% more than what occurred ten years ago.¹ The challenges are even more acute for Maryland’s youth with virtually every mental health indicator trending in the wrong direction. Approximately one in four Maryland middle school students have seriously considered suicide, one in five have made a suicide plan, and one in ten have attempted suicide. These rates have been increasing for years and only got worse after the COVID-19 pandemic.² The state must respond to this emergency and 988 can play an important role.

Since its launch in 2022, 988 has provided 24/7, free supportive counseling, information, and referrals to all Marylanders who call or text. These services are effective at helping individuals experiencing thoughts of suicide or other emotional distress resolve their crisis, achieve relief, and stay safe, with more than 80% of all calls being resolved over the phone. For situations that cannot be resolved over the phone, 988 counselors can have specialized mental health teams dispatched into the community and can work with 911 to keep the caller safe.

Maryland has seen about a 60% increase in 988 calls since the 2022 launch and a 13-fold increase in texts to 988. The eight Maryland 988 call centers and one regional partnership have kept up with this increased demand thanks to significant funding from federal grants and state general revenue funds. This funding has allowed call centers to hire over 100 new staff, procure new phone and data systems, and improve performance so that local 988 call centers can respond more quickly to a higher proportion of calls and texts. The state should expect funding needs to increase, however, as more people become familiar with 988 and federal performance goals continue to increase.

SB 974 would establish a permanent funding solution to make sure 988 is fully funded and able to keep up with demand. The bill would establish a \$0.25 telecom fee applied each month to landlines, cell phones, and prepaid phone purchases modeled after the long-standing 911 telecom fee. The

\$0.25/month 988 telecom fee would generate \$15-20 million in revenue each year which would be deposited in the 988 Trust Fund. The Maryland Department of Health administers the 988 Trust Fund and allocates funding to the 988 call centers across the state. This nominal fee on phone bills would provide enough funding to maintain all current 988 operations and make some targeted improvements. The bill also includes an exemption for households enrolled in the federal low-cost phone Lifeline program which would exempt about 250,000 households.

Creating a dependable source of funding for 988 through a telecom fee would give the state and call centers the budgetary predictability needed to plan for 988 system improvements and expansions. 988 is an effective and life-saving resource, but it has only been available in its current form for less than two years. The state has significant investments to make to improve data collection, increase text message capacity, expand counselor training, and better integrate 988 into the public behavioral health system. Maryland must also continue to improve its local answer rate and timeliness to meet forthcoming federal performance expectations and ensure reliable service for Marylanders. The telecom fee created under SB 974 would allow these investments and help Maryland's 988 helplines continue to grow.

Building upon 988 to create an even more robust network is critical to solving many of the state's challenges. If fully funded, 988 can serve as a universal access point that can provide education and early intervention to prevent behavioral health challenges from escalating. It can play a large role in preventing unnecessary trips to the hospital emergency department (ED) and help the state reduce high-end health care costs and long ED wait times. 988 can serve as an alternative to 911 and reduce our reliance on the criminal justice system in addressing behavioral health challenges. And 988 can play a leading role in helping Maryland's young people to improve their mental health and wellness.

Congress gave states the authority to establish telecom fees in the legislation that created 988. Eight states have availed themselves of this option to date with many more considering it this year. Maryland should join states such as Virginia and Delaware in giving 988 a strong financial foundation through a 988 telecom fee. **BHSB urges the Senate Budget & Tax Committee to support SB 974 and ensure a strong Maryland 988 system for years to come.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy and Communications Vice President Adrienne Breidenstine or BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt

Contact

Adrienne Breidenstine
Vice President, Policy & Communications
Adrienne.Breidenstine@bhsbaltimore.org
443-908-0503

Dan Rabbitt
Director, Policy
Daniel.Rabbitt@bhsbaltimore.org
443-401-6142

References:

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). "Behavioral Health Barometer: Maryland, Volume 6: Indicators as measured through the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health and the National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services." Available at https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt32837/Maryland-BH-Barometer_Volume6.pdf.

² Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2021-2022." Available at <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Reports/Pages/State-Level-Data,-2021-2022.aspx>.

SB0974_FAV_MDACEP_BH Crisis Response Serv. - 9-8-

Uploaded by: Danna Kauffman

Position: FAV



Maryland Chapter

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF
EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS

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

FROM: Danna L. Kauffman
Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
410-244-7000

DATE: February 28, 2024

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 974 – *Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees*

The Maryland Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians (MDACEP), which represents the interests of emergency physicians and their patients throughout the State of Maryland, **supports** Senate Bill 974. This bill creates permanent funding for the 9-8-8 trust fund through a surcharge on cellular lines.

In 2020, Congress passed, and the President signed into law the National Suicide Designation Act of 2020, which establishes 9-8-8 as a universal number for mental health crises and suicide prevention. In July 2022, 9-8-8 went live and all phone companies route 9-8-8 calls to local crisis call centers that are part of the Lifeline network, which provide 24/7 free, confidential, emotional support to individuals calling for help. The need for 9-8-8 and the access to a continuum of crisis services is greater than ever, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide has become a leading cause of death in the United States, with the rate the highest in ages 10-34 years old.

As the health care safety net, the emergency department is often the first – and sometimes only – point of contact for individuals experiencing mental health crises or other behavioral health challenges. 9-8-8 is an important partner to ensure individuals experiencing mental health, substance use, and/or suicide crises receive help when it is needed most. Ensuring that 9-8-8 is not hampered by inadequate funding is an important step to ensure access to mental health services. Senate Bill 974 provides permanent funding, rather than requiring a general fund appropriation each year, and MDACEP urges a favorable report.

2.28.24_Henriot St.Gerard Testimony for SB 974.pdf

Uploaded by: Henriot StGerard

Position: FAV

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 Henriot St. Gerard, and I proudly serve as a Board Member at EveryMind, a nonprofit dedicated to providing crucial mental health education and support services across Maryland for over 65 years. EveryMind operates as a primary Call Center and a key provider of text and chat services, responding swiftly to those in crisis since 2005.

Today, I advocate for SB 974, which aims to establish a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund, vital for sustaining and enhancing the 988 helpline in Maryland. Despite the establishment of the 988 Trust Fund in 2022, the absence of a permanent funding source poses a significant challenge. SB 974 proposes a solution through a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee, projected to generate \$15-20 million annually, essential for supporting operations, technology upgrades, and service expansions.

The statistics speak volumes about the urgency of this matter. Attempted suicide rates among high school students, particularly among females, black teens, and LGBTQ+ teens, are alarmingly high. More than 20% of teens have seriously considered suicide, with even higher rates among LGBTQ+ youth. Moreover, older adults and veterans are disproportionately affected, with suicide rates higher than the general population. These figures underscore the critical need for increased support, resources, and interventions to address the concerning rise in suicide rates among vulnerable populations.

While EveryMind has made strides in expanding crisis response services, sustainable funding is imperative to maintain and enhance our efforts. As a Board Member of EveryMind and a concerned citizen deeply committed to the well-being of our youth and mental health advocacy, **I urge the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.** Let's ensure that Marylanders, particularly our vulnerable youth, can access lifesaving support through the 988 Lifeline. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Henriot St.Gerard
Board Member, EveryMind

SB 974 - SUPP to B&T - 988 Funding - Feb 28.pdf

Uploaded by: Henry Bogdan

Position: FAV



marylandnonprofits.org

1500 Union Avenue | Suite 2500 | Baltimore, MD 21211
410.727.6367 | 800.273.6367 | Fax 410.235.2190

February 28, 2024

Testimony on Senate Bill 974
Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Position: Favorable

Maryland Nonprofits is a statewide association of almost 1800 nonprofit organizations and institutions. We urge you to support Senate Bill 974 to establish 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.

Senate Bill 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.

The availability of timely behavioral health care in times of crisis is critical to reduce physical harm or dangers, and the unnecessary diversion and costs of police or other first responder time and resources, often including emergency room services.

We urge you to give Senate Bill 974 a favorable report.



Maryland Nonprofits' mission is to strengthen organizations and networks for greater quality of life and equity.

SB 974 - Favorable (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Henry J. Meiser

Position: FAV

TO: Committee on Budget and Taxation, Maryland Senate

FROM: Henry J. Meiser, 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

SB974_Favorable_MdPHA.pdf

Uploaded by: Ilona Kabara

Position: FAV



Mission: *To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy*

Vision: *Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities*

SB0974: Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees

Hearing Date: 02/28/24

Committee: Budget and Taxation

Position: SUPPORT

Chair Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of SB0974. The Maryland Public Health Association is pleased to support SB0974: 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. The General Assembly appropriated \$17.5 million for the 988 Trust Fund over two years¹. These state and federal funds run out next year. Maryland's 988 network needs a permanent funding source to address this fiscal cliff.

To assist states with their funding responsibilities, Congress authorized the use of a telecom fee to sustain and build their 988 and crisis response system. All 50 states use a 911 telecom fee to fund their 911 systems and a similar funding mechanism can be used to build a high-quality and robust 988 system. Eight states have enacted a 988 telecom fee so far including Virginia and Delaware.²

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.² 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. The Maryland Public Health Association urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB0974.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA)
PO Box 7045 • 6801 Oak Hall Ln • Columbia, MD 21045-9998
GetInfo@MdPHA.org www.mdpha.org 443.475.0242

¹ Fund MD 988 Campaign: The Plan to Sustainably Fund the Maryland 988 Trust Fund.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/618d29f06b02e03d1306c9d1/t/65a1772d25aa096446a91d73/1705080621905/POL+BRF_988+Telecom+Fee_Aug+2023+%281%29.pdf

² Fund MD 988 Campaign: Support HB0933/SB0974 For a Strong 988 Helpline in Maryland.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/618d29f06b02e03d1306c9d1/t/65c2479e99ce85417ca7ce0e/1707231134967/02+9880FACTSHEET-020524.pdf>

LCC Testimony SB974.pdf

Uploaded by: Jamie Manning

Position: FAV



Life Crisis Center, Inc.
PO Box 387
Salisbury, MD 21803
Business: 410-749-0632
Fax: 410-548-9496

February 28, 2024

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

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

February 27, 2024

Testimony of Life Crisis Center

Position: Support

Dear Chairman:

The Life Crisis Center, Inc. (LCC) provides trauma specific therapy, shelter, legal services, 24/7 crisis intervention, and case management for survivors of sexual assault, sexual and physical child abuse, child sexual assault, interpersonal violence and human sex trafficking in Worcester, Somerset and Wicomico Counties. We additionally provide 24/7 hotline services through 988 and 211 Maryland for the 9 counties on the Shore.

Life Crisis Center 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.

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.

To improve the quality of life in our community through crisis intervention and violence prevention
A United Way Agency Serving Wicomico, Worcester, & Somerset Counties

Demands for resources through 988 greatly increased during this year. These counties of the Shore are primarily rural and lack many resources available to the more metropolitan areas. Our hotline numbers have grown from 38,000 to 48,000 in the past year and the resources we provide are critical and lifesaving. The calls are almost exclusively complex trauma with multiple layers of complicated factors such as poverty, isolation and addictions leading many to want to find an end. The very heart of our work is mission driven. Life Crisis Center never charges for any of our services so this secure funding allows our crisis specialist the ability to be there for Marylanders and provide trauma informed support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Life Crisis Center urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jamie Manning". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jamie Manning, LCSW-C, CNP
Executive Director

SB 974 - B&T - MDH- LOS.pdf

Uploaded by: Jason Caplan

Position: FAV



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: Senate Bill 974 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees - Letter of Support

Dear Chair Guzzone and Committee members:

The Maryland Department of Health (Department) respectfully submits this letter of support for Senate Bill (SB) 974 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees. SB 974 establishes fees for 9-8-8 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services which will be paid by each subscriber for switched local exchange access service, commercial mobile radio service, and other 9-8-8 accessible services. The bill also establishes a fee on certain wireless retail transactions. Under HB 933, the Comptroller will deposit these fees in the 9-8-8 Trust Fund and develop procedures for collection and payment.

Currently, the 9-8-8 Trust Fund exists to provide reimbursement for costs associated with designating and maintaining 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number for national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline by the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020. The fund is also used to develop and implement a statewide initiative for the coordination and delivery of the continuum of behavioral health crisis response services in the State, including:

1. Crisis call centers;
2. Mobile crisis team services;
3. Crisis stabilization centers,
4. Other acute behavioral health care services.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that nationally one person died by suicide every 11 minutes in 2021,¹ The [9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](https://health.maryland.gov/bha/Pages/988md.aspx)² supports immediate and reliable access to suicide prevention and mental health crisis intervention. 9-8-8 provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, seven days a week, through phone, text, and chat.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>

² <https://health.maryland.gov/bha/Pages/988md.aspx>

The usage of the 9-8-8 emergency hotline is steadily increasing as more people become aware of it, thanks in part to the ongoing public awareness campaign by the Department. Since the transition from an eight to three-digit number in July 2022, monthly call volume has increased by 107%. The 9-8-8 hotline is a crucial entry point to the urgent and acute care system. The Moore-Miller Administration has included behavioral health crisis response services as part of the \$107.5 million behavioral health investment to ensure that professionals can respond when individuals face behavioral health crises and provide a safe place to stabilize.

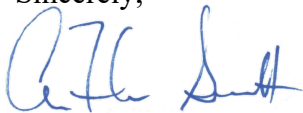
Funding for 9-8-8 is secured annually through four state and federal funds sources. This legislation assures the program's long-term sustainability and enables proper planning for program operations, similar to the 9-1-1 emergency service.

With this legislation, Maryland would join other states charging a fee to sustain 9-8-8, including California, Colorado, Delaware, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington. Additional states considering similar legislation include New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.

The Department supports SB 974 as an important step to ensure that the 9-8-8 continues to be available for Maryland residents.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Case-Herron, Director of Governmental Affairs at sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov or (443) 826-1851.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Herrera Scott".

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary

SB974 988 Fee - JH Support 2.28.24.pdf

Uploaded by: Jeanette Ortiz

Position: FAV

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**.

2024 SB974 LifeBridge Health Testimony.Jennifer Wi

Uploaded by: Jennifer Witten

Position: FAV



Date: February 28, 2024

To: Chair Guy Guzzone and Vice Chair Jim Rosapepe of the Budget and Taxation Committee

Senate Bill 974 – Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Guzzone and Committee Members:

On behalf of LifeBridge Health, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on SB974.

LifeBridge Health is a regional health system comprising Sinai Hospital of Baltimore, an independent academic medical center; Levindale Hebrew Geriatric Center and Hospital in Baltimore; Northwest Hospital, a community hospital in Baltimore County; Carroll Hospital, a sole community hospital in Carroll County; Grace Medical Center (formerly Bon Secours Hospital), a freestanding medical facility in West Baltimore; and Center for Hope a center of excellence focused on provided hope and services for trauma survivors in Baltimore City.

Behavioral health crisis services and the suicide prevention lifeline are effective interventions that reduce the likelihood of inpatient hospitalization and help prevent tragic deaths due to suicide or overdose. The transition to 988 as the national suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis hotline provides a once in a generation opportunity to strengthen Maryland’s behavioral health system.

We have consistently seen increased numbers of individuals in mental health or suicidal crisis present to our emergency rooms. Whether brought by EMS in an ambulance, or by law enforcement, or even by family members, these capable and well-meaning responders simply do not have the capacity to provide the care people need when in crisis. Like all providers, LifeBridge has seen an increase in behavioral health needs during the pandemic, but the problem predates the pandemic. In fact, this steady increase and the pressure it puts on our Emergency Room to respond has caused us to redesign our new Emergency Room with more capacity for behavioral health patients and to increase inpatient behavioral health capacity as well. While this will enhance care for these patients, it does not guarantee the type of response individuals need when in crisis. Hospital emergency rooms are not optimal sites for addressing the needs of people experiencing suicidal or other behavioral health crisis, as hospitals must also triage life-threatening medical emergencies, resulting in delays of hours or even days for behavioral crisis patients.

LifeBridge and our hospital partners are committed to supporting crisis services through regional catalyst programs like the Greater Baltimore Regional Integrated Crisis System (GBRICS). Strengthening our local

CARE BRAVELY

network of crisis call centers through establishing a 988 Trust Fund will help ensure these system enhancements are successful.

For all the above stated reasons, we request a **FAVORABLE** report for SB974.

For more information, please contact:

Jennifer Witten, M.B.A.

Vice President, Government Relations & Community Development

jwitten2@lifebridgedhealth.org

Mobile: 505-688-3495

SB 974_MD Center on Economic Policy_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kali Schumitz

Position: FAV

Adequate and Sustainable Funding is Necessary for Mental Health Resources

Position Statement Supporting Senate Bill 974

Given before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Mental health services are essential to the well-being of all Marylanders. Just like we call on police or medical personnel to aid us during public safety crises, we should be able to call on professional services to help individuals experiencing mental health crises to access the best or most effective resources to cope with their hardships. The 988 mental health lifeline helps with that: it provides behavioral health services, and it is a resource that necessitates continued funding to build a stronger infrastructure to care for all Marylanders in need.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports SB 974 in establishing a permanent funding source for 988 mental health services.

SB 974 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 low cost of \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee modeled after Maryland's current 911 funding structure. This would likely 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.

The truth is that demand for mental health services is high. From July 2022 to May 2023, the 988 helpline received close to 5 million contacts nationwide.¹ Unfortunately, the most common reason for contact was related to suicide concerns, highlighting just how crucial it is to sustain the helpline. Maryland's in-state answer rate from April to May 2023 was almost 90%, with 8,741 calls made during that period.¹ With sustainable funding for support, we can ensure that Marylanders are able to access help in a timely manner.

For these reasons, **the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to make a favorable report on Senate Bill 974.**

Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 974

Bill Summary

SB 974 establishes a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund to sustain and strengthen 988 mental health helpline services in Maryland through a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee modeled after Maryland's current 911 funding structure. Customers of the federal Lifeline program which provides a discount on telephone services and other communications are exempt from this fee.

Background

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.

Equity Implications

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1 in 5 adults live with mental health concerns in the United States.ⁱⁱ However, not everyone is aware of mental health services like 988. People knowledgeable about the 988 helpline as a mental health resource tend to be white, higher income, and more institutionally educated.ⁱⁱⁱ Because economic hardship is associated with increases in mental health problems,^{iv} it is important that we can sustain a helpline that is available to all. This is especially important for communities of color who disproportionately live in poverty and experience disinvestments in their communities, leaving them out of resources to cope with mental health crises.

Impact

Senate Bill 974 will likely **improve racial and health equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ Saunders, H. (2023, July 14). Taking a look at 988 suicide and crisis lifeline implementation one year after launch. *Kaiser Family Foundation*. <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/taking-a-look-at-988-suicide-crisis-lifeline-implementation-one-year-after-launch/>

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d). About mental health. Retrieved February 2024 from <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Velazquez, T. (2023, November 8). Most U.S. adults remain unaware of 988 suicide and crisis lifeline. *The Pew Charitable Trusts*. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2023/05/23/most-us-adults-remain-unaware-of-988-suicide-and-crisis-lifeline>

^{iv} Hodgkinson, S., Godoy, L., Beers, L. S., & Lewin, A. (2017). Improving mental health access for low-income children and families in the primary care setting. *Pediatrics*, 139(1). doi: [10.1542/peds.2015-1175](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-1175)

MARTIN_MCHI_FAV_SB 974.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Lyla Martin

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF SENATE BILL 974
Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees
Before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
By Lyla Martin, Intern, Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative
February 28, 2024

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the House HGO Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 974, which would establish a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund to sustain and strengthen 988 mental health helpline services in Maryland. We especially thank Chair Guzzone for sponsoring this critical legislation.

Our mission is to advocate for policies that ensure access to quality, affordable health care for all Marylanders. Maryland communities need mental health support more than ever and investing in the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a critical way to provide that support. In 2022 Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund 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. Unfortunately, these state and federal funds will end 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.

Maryland has one of the top five health care systems in the U.S., and this legislation will help Maryland continue to lead the nation. We urge a favorable report for SB 974.

2021-State-Data-Sheet-Maryland-508-1.pdf

Uploaded by: Lynn Nash

Position: FAV

Maryland

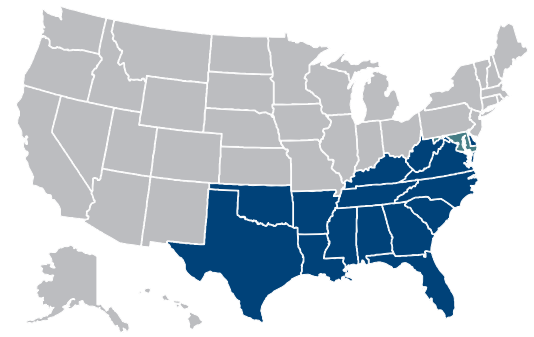
Veteran Suicide Data Sheet, 2021

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is leading efforts to understand suicide risk factors, develop evidence-based prevention programs, and prevent Veteran suicide through a public health approach. As part of its work, VA analyzes data at the national and state levels to guide the design and execution of the most effective strategies to prevent Veteran suicide.

The 2021 state data sheets present the latest findings from VA's ongoing analysis of suicide rates and include the most up-to-date state-level suicide information for the United States.^a This data sheet includes information about Maryland Veteran suicides by age, sex, and suicide method and compares this with regional and national data.

After accounting for age differences,^b the Veteran suicide rate in Maryland:

- Was significantly lower than the national Veteran suicide rate
- Was not significantly different from the national general population suicide rate



Southern Region

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Delaware
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- Georgia
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maryland
- Mississippi
- North Carolina
- Oklahoma
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Virginia
- West Virginia

Maryland Veteran Suicide Deaths, 2021

Sex	Veteran Suicides
Male	80–90
Female	<10
All	89

To protect confidentiality, suicide death counts are presented in ranges when the number of deaths in any one category was lower than 10.

Maryland, Southern Region, and National Veteran Suicide Deaths and Rates by Age Group, 2021^c

Age Group	Maryland Veteran Suicides	Southern Region Veteran Suicides	National Veteran Suicides	Maryland Veteran Suicide Rate per 100,000	Southern Region Veteran Suicide Rate per 100,000	National Veteran Suicide Rate per 100,000
18–34	<10	389	894	--	47.8	49.6
35–54	20–30	757	1,704	--	33.9	35.5
55–74	35	1,001	2,286	22.9	30.4	29.9
75+	27	636	1,467	35.1	35.6	32.1
All	89	2,798	6,392	24.5	34.4	33.9

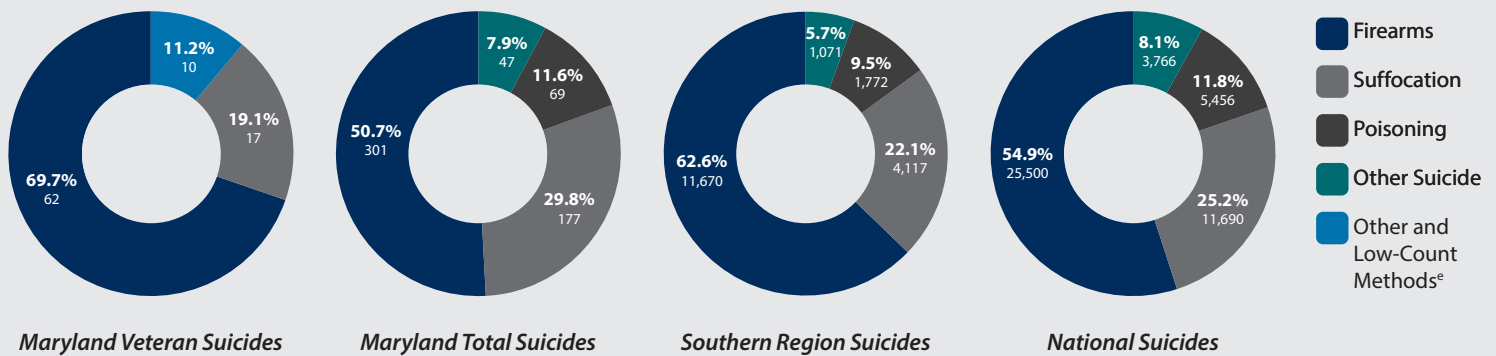
Maryland Veteran and Total Maryland, Southern Region, and National Suicide Deaths and Rates by Age Group, 2021^c

Age Group	Maryland Veteran Suicides	Maryland Total Suicides	Southern Region Total Suicides	National Total Suicides	Maryland Veteran Suicide Rate per 100,000	Maryland Suicide Rate per 100,000	Southern Region Suicide Rate per 100,000	National Suicide Rate per 100,000
18–34	<10	171	5,667	14,230	--	12.7	19.7	18.8
35–54	20–30	193	6,141	15,263	--	12.0	19.0	18.2
55–74	35	165	4,970	12,411	22.9	11.4	17.2	16.2
75+	27	65	1,852	4,508	35.1	16.3	22.1	20.3
All	89	594	18,630	46,412	24.5	12.4	18.9	18.0



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Maryland Veteran and Total Maryland, Southern Region, and National Suicide Deaths by Method,^d 2021



These 2021 state data sheets are based on a collaborative effort among the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). The statistics presented are derived from multiple data sources, including the VA Office of Enterprise Integration, the VA Serious Mental Illness Treatment Resource and Evaluation Center, VA Health Outcomes Military Exposures (HOME) Program, the VA Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention, and the DoD Defense Suicide Prevention Office.

These sheets include information on the Veteran population and general U.S. population age 18 and older, with deaths reported in the contiguous United States, Alaska, and Hawaii. The total state, regional, and national counts and rates presented include both Veterans and non-Veterans.

Suicide deaths are identified based on the underlying cause of death indicated on the state death certificate. For Veteran decedents, this information comes from the NCHS National Death Index (NDI) and was obtained from the joint VA/DoD Mortality Data Repository (MDR). Suicide death counts for the general U.S. population were obtained from CDC WONDER (Wide-ranging ONline Data for Epidemiologic Research).^f Underlying cause of death is defined as (a) the disease or injury that initiated the train of events leading directly to death, or (b) the circumstances of the accident or violence that produced the fatal injury.^g The ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases, 10th revision) codes used to define suicide deaths are X60–X84, U03, and Y87.0.

Suicide rates presented are unadjusted rates per 100,000, calculated as the number of suicide deaths in 2021 divided by the estimated population and multiplied by 100,000. Significance statements are based on the ratio of direct age-adjusted rates, using the 2000 projected U.S. population as the standard.^h Linearly interpolated estimates of the Veteran Population Projection Model 2020 (VetPop2020) were used in calculating rates to estimate the Veteran population for each state and age group.ⁱ These estimates were calculated to reflect the Veteran population estimate as of July 1st. Based on guidance from the VA Office of Enterprise Integration, the interpolated July 1st Veteran population estimates were generated by calculating the population difference between current and prior year estimates on September 30th provided in VetPop and multiplying by an adjustment factor for the time difference between July 1st and September 30th. NCHS single-race population estimates were used to estimate the general U.S. population.^j

Veteran age-specific counts may not sum to the total counts because there are a small number of deaths for which age information is unavailable. These deaths are included in overall counts and rates but are not distributed among age groups; therefore, they are not included in age-specific counts, age-specific rates, or age-adjusted rates. Rates are marked with an asterisk (*) when the rate is calculated from fewer than 20 deaths. Rates based on small numbers of deaths are considered statistically unreliable because a small change in the number of deaths might result in a large change in the rate. Because suicide rates based on fewer than 20 suicide deaths are considered statistically unreliable, any comparisons between age-adjusted rates and underlying age-specific rates based on fewer than 20 suicide deaths should be interpreted with caution.

To protect privacy and to prevent revealing information that may identify specific decedents, counts and rates are suppressed when based on 0–9 individuals. For suicide deaths by method, in cases where the number of deaths in any one of the categories was lower than 10, the categories with the smallest counts were combined until the minimum count of 10 was reached, to maintain confidentiality.

^a The 2021 state data sheets contain suicide information for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

^b Suicide rates presented in the tables are unadjusted for age. Age-adjusting suicide rates ensures that the differences in rates are not due to differences in the age distributions of the populations being compared. In some cases, the results of comparisons of age-adjusted rates differ from those of unadjusted rates. Comparison of rates is based on the ratio of age-adjusted rates; significance is determined based on a p-value <0.05.

^c Rates presented are unadjusted rates per 100,000. To protect privacy, and prevent revealing information that may identify specific individuals, counts and rates are suppressed when based on 0–9 people. Rates calculated with a numerator of less than 20 are considered statistically unreliable, as indicated by an asterisk (*).

^d Methods are based on ICD-10 codes X72 to X74 for firearms, X60 to X69 for poisoning (including intentional overdose), and X70 for suffocation (including strangulation). "Other Suicide" includes all other intentional self-harm, including cutting/piercing, drowning, falling, fire/flame, other land transport, being struck by/against, and other specified or unspecified injury.

^e "Other Suicide" refers to all methods of suicide death apart from firearms, suffocation, and poisoning. "Low-Count Methods" refers to methods involved in fewer than 10 deaths in a given state or territory. In states or territories with fewer than 10 firearm deaths, suffocation deaths, or poisoning deaths, those data are represented in the "Other and Low-Count Methods" category to protect the privacy of individual suicide decedents.

^f National, regional, and state general population suicide counts are obtained from the CDC WONDER online database. For more information on CDC WONDER, please refer to <http://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10.html>.

^g World Health Organization, Manual of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries, and Causes of Death, based on the recommendations of the Ninth Revision Conference, 1975; Geneva, 1977.

^h Klein, RJ, and Schoenborn, CA. Age adjustment using the 2000 projected U.S. population. Healthy People Statistical Notes, No. 20. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. January 2001.

ⁱ Veteran Population Projection Model 2020 (VetPop2020), Predictive Analytics and Actuary, Office of Enterprise Integration, Department of Veterans Affairs.

^j CDC, NCHS, Single-race Population Estimates, United States, 2021. July 1st resident population by state, age, sex, single-race, and Hispanic origin, on CDC WONDER Online Database. Vintage 2021 estimates released by U.S. Census Bureau on June 30, 2022. Accessed at <http://wonder.cdc.gov/single-race-single-year-v2021.html>.

Nash MMC written testimony_SB 974_ 9-8-8 Trust Fun

Uploaded by: Lynn Nash

Position: FAV



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair
The Honorable Jim Rosapepe, Vice Chair
Budget and Taxation Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 3 West Annapolis,
MD 21401

Subject: Request for a FAVORABLE Report - SB 974— Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9–8–8 Trust Fund Fees

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Military Coalition and as its Communications Director, I write to recommend a FAVORABLE report by the Committee on ***SB 974 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9–8–8 Trust Fund Fees***, sponsored by Chair Guzzone. I am a nurse and I currently serve on the Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and Families.

As a licensed healthcare professional, I testified in support of Senate Bill 241 “Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund” in 2022. It passed, and in July, the Maryland Department of Health designated 9-8-8 as the State’s behavioral health crisis hotline as part of a *statewide initiative* for the coordination and delivery of the *continuum of behavioral health crisis response services* in the State. In addition to crisis call centers, this bill established mobile crisis team services and crisis stabilization centers. Last year, I testified on behalf of SB 003 “9-8-8 Trust Fund - Funding”, which required the Governor to include an appropriation for the lifeline in his budget. It also passed. Today, I am asking for a favorable report on establishing trust fund fees, necessary to enable the continued operation of the 9-8-8 lifeline, mobile crisis team services and crisis stabilization centers. This bill established a 9-8-8 fee (\$0.25 (cents)/month) to be paid by every subscriber to a landline or cell phone. These fees will be deposited in the Trust Fund and used only for carrying out the purpose of the fund.

Suicide rates have been increasing for the past twenty years, but among active-duty personnel and veterans of the post-9/11 wars, the suicide rate is even higher, outpacing average Americans. Do you know that **FOUR times** as many active-duty personnel and war veterans of post-9/11 conflicts **have died of suicide rather than in combat**? These high suicide rates are caused by multiple factors, including risks inherent to fighting in any war such as high exposure to trauma, stress, the “military” culture and training, continued access to guns, and the difficulty of reintegrating into civilian life.

1101 Mercantile Lane, Suite 260 • Largo, Maryland 20774
(301) 583-8687 • (800) 808-4517

Subject: Request for a FAVORABLE Report - SB 974 – Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9–8–8 Trust Fund Fees

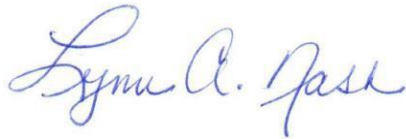
According to the Centers for Disease Control’s most recent data, **Maryland had 620 suicides in 2021¹; of which 89 were veterans²**. While getting 9-8-8 data was a little difficult, a member of the Department of Health reported that in **January 2024, there were 4,477 calls to the 9-8-8 lifeline**, a 107% increase in monthly call volume since the transition to the three-digit number in July 2022. The volume demonstrates that **the lifeline is working**—providing needed services to Marylanders.

Maryland is home to 34,444 active-duty service members, 14,292 active-duty spouses and 25,642 reservists/national guard members with 28,019 family members³. These are Department of Defense numbers only and do not include the 1,700 active-duty U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) members and the 7,000 PHS retirees and their families or the active duty and retired National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) service members who also live in Maryland. In addition, there are 355,787 veteran households⁴. **Maryland needs continued 9-8-8 services to meet the mental health needs of our citizens, especially our veterans.**

The Maryland Military Coalition, is a voluntary, non-partisan organization representing 21 veteran service organizations who, in turn, serve over 150,000 Maryland uniformed services men and women and their families. The Coalition ***strongly supports*** SB 974- **Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9–8–8 Trust Fund Fees** and asks for your **favorable report**.

We thank Chair Guzzone for sponsoring this important legislation and his continued support of the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,



Lynn A. Nash, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN
CAPT (R), U.S. Public Health Service
Communications Director

Attachment: Maryland Veteran Suicide Data Sheet, 2021

Maryland Military Coalition Member Organizations Follow

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Suicide Mortality by State](#).

² U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, [State-Level Veteran Suicide Data](#): 2021 Update

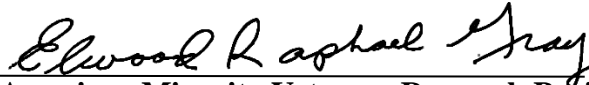
³ [Military One Source](#), as of December 31, 2022

⁴ [VA Claim Insider](#), August 10, 2023


Member Organizations, Maryland Military Coalition


Air Force Sergeants Association


American Military Society


American Minority Veterans Research Project

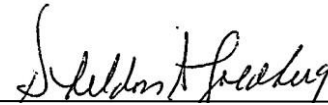

Association of the United States Navy



Commissioned Officers Association of the
US Public Health Service


Disabled American Veterans


Distinguished Flying Cross Association


Fleet Reserve Association


Jewish War Veterans of the USA


Maryland Air National Guard Retirees'
Association


Maryland Veterans Chamber of Commerce


Military Officers Association of America


Military Order of the Purple Heart

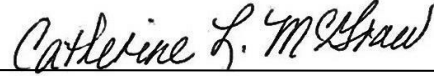

Montford Point Marines of America



National Association for Black Veterans


Naval Enlisted Reserve Association


NOAA Association of Commissioned Officers


Reserve Organization of America


Society of Military Widows


National Active and Retired Federal Employees
Veterans Affairs Directorate, NARFE MD


Veterans of Foreign Wars

SB0974_CC_Martinez_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Madelin Martinez

Position: FAV

Senate Bill 974
Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees
Budget & Taxation Committee
February 28, 2024
Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports SB 974, which establishes a \$0.25 per month fee on services like regular phone lines and cell phone plans and on certain retail transactions, to fund the 9-8-8 Trust Fund, the designated national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline number.

For a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

Since its launch in July 2022, the 988 service has received and routed approximately 8.6 million calls, texts, and chats.¹ The implementation of the 988 service marked a critical milestone in providing essential crisis support to individuals across the United States. With the simple access of dialing or texting 988, or engaging in chat support through 988lifeline.org, individuals in distress or those concerned about loved ones can connect with trained counselors 24/7.

This universal entry point ensures that help is accessible regardless of one's location, offering immediate assistance for a range of mental health-related issues, including suicidal thoughts, emotional distress, and substance use crises. However, the urgent need for this service is underscored by alarming statistics highlighting the prevalence of mental health crises in our nation. With an increase in drug overdoses, it is evident that too many individuals are suffering without adequate support.¹ The 988 Lifeline serves as a beacon of hope, providing vital intervention and support to thousands of individuals daily. **Therefore, it is imperative that we prioritize funding for this crucial program to ensure that individuals in crisis receive the care and support they desperately need.**

As the second largest behavioral health provider in Maryland, our ability to effectively connect with clients is paramount to delivering quality care. **The establishment of a dedicated funding stream through subscriber fees, as proposed in SB 974, ensures that individuals experiencing mental health crises, including our clients, have immediate access to vital resources and assistance.** This seamless connection to crisis supports services not only reinforces our commitment to meeting the evolving needs of our community but also strengthens our ability to provide timely intervention and support to those who need it.

For these reasons, Catholic Charities urges the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 974.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy

1. 988 Lifeline Performance Metrics. www.samhsa.gov. <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/performance-metrics>

SB974 FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Morgan Mills

Position: FAV

February 28, 2024

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and distinguished members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses, their families, and the wider community.

In 2022, Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund to provide dedicated funding for 988—but no permanent funding source was established at that time. SB974 creates this permanent funding mechanism through a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee, which is 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 counselling and support when they need it.

There are 781,000 Marylanders with a mental health condition and 181,000 with a serious mental illness. A priority of NAMI MD is to ensure adequate funding to support programs to reach this target population. The goal of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is to provide immediate crisis intervention and support. When someone contacts 988, a trained crisis counselor will answer, listen to the person, provide support, and share resources as needed. Crisis counselors are trained to help in a variety of crisis situations.

We need 24/7 local crisis call centers to meet the demands in every community with these trained staff who can connect people to local services, dispatch mobile crisis teams, and schedule follow-up appointments with local providers. To achieve this, we need the money to fund the training, call centers, the 9-8-8-call number and facilities required for these critical services. 79% of Marylanders agree that they would be willing to pay an extra \$0.25 a month on their phone bill for the 9-8-8 helpline.

NAMI MD is committed to advancing efforts to reimagine crisis response in our State. Funding 988 is the first step in reimagining our crisis response. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

Kathryn S. Farinholt
Executive Director
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland

Contact: Morgan Mills
Compass Government Relations
Mmills@compassadvocacy.com

NCADD-MD - 2024 SB 974 FAV - 988 Funding - Senate.

Uploaded by: Nancy Rosen-Cohen

Position: FAV



**Senate Budget & Tax Committee
February 28, 2024**

**Senate Bill 974 – Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services –
9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees**

Support

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-MD strongly supports SB 974. This bill establishes a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund to sustain and strengthen 988 mental health helpline services in Maryland.

The General Assembly created the 988 Trust Fund in 2022 to provide dedicated funding for this system, but no permanent funding source was established. Federal grants and state general funds have supported the program so far. We now need a permanent funding source to ensure the services can continue.

SB 974 would create a 25 cents per month per line telecom fee modeled after Maryland's current 911 funding structure. This small fee would generate \$15-20 million annually to support current 988 operations, investments in new technology, and targeted service expansions. This will enable Marylanders to access 988 for lifesaving counseling and support when they need it.

We ask for a favorable report on SB 974.

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) is a statewide organization that works to influence public and private policies on addiction, treatment, and recovery, reduce the stigma associated with the disease, and improve the understanding of addictions and the recovery process. We advocate for and with individuals and families who are affected by alcoholism and drug addiction.

BCRI SB 974 Support Testimony Final.pdf

Uploaded by: Nicholas Richard

Position: FAV

February 28, 2024

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

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

Baltimore Crisis Response, Inc. (BCRI) is a 501(c)(3) private non-profit behavioral health and crisis services organization. Incorporated in 1992, BCRI has provided behavioral health, substance use, and crisis services in Maryland for over thirty years. BCRI currently oversees the Central Maryland Regional 988 Call Center, dispatches mobile response teams, offers crisis and substance use residential units, and provides training and education on mental health. BCRI aims to provide high-quality services through holistic and trauma-informed care and resources, working closely with community partners to create a caring behavioral health ecosystem, and advocating for investments in the crisis services system.

BCRI 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.

As the administrator and one of the operators of the innovative Central Maryland Regional 988 Helpline, BCRI believes that the establishment of a permanent funding mechanism to support ongoing 988 operations and initiatives would be greatly beneficial to the sustainability of 988 services. BCRI and its partnering providers receive tens of thousands of calls for help each year from Marylanders requesting emotional support, counseling, and linkages to community resources – a figure that is only increasing as more people utilize 988 each year. The funding generated by the nominal 988 telecom fee would ensure that Maryland's crisis services providers can continue to offer these lifechanging services to all who need them.

Accordingly, Baltimore Crisis Response, Inc. (BCRI) urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.

SB 974_Horizon Foundation_fav.pdf

Uploaded by: Nikki Highsmith Vernick

Position: FAV



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

February 28, 2024

COMMITTEE: Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

BILL: SB 974 – Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 988 Trust Fund Fees

POSITION: Support

The Horizon Foundation is the largest independent health philanthropy in Maryland. We are committed to a Howard County free from systemic inequities, where all people can live abundant and healthy lives.

The Foundation 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.

Like many communities across the country, mental and behavioral health needs in Howard County have been on the rise and barriers remain to ensuring robust and equitable access to care. In our county’s most recent health assessment, the number of residents who reported experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety jumped significantly compared to the last survey in 2018, and only 16% reported receiving some type of treatment.ⁱ We also continue to see stark racial disparities in mental health. In the same survey, Black and Hispanic residents were much more likely than their White counterparts to report feeling a lack of interest or pleasure in doing things – as were residents with low income – in addition to feelings of being down,

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David Wolf

Lanlan Xu, Ph.D

depressed or hopeless. There is also growing research that shows chronic stress and trauma due to racism exacerbates mental and behavioral health challenges for people of color.

These rates are startling and reflect larger systemic issues and the need for expanded mental health and behavioral health crisis services – including and beyond 988. Ensuring sustainable funding to support local crisis call centers and other crisis services is critical to meeting the needs of all of our community members and saving lives.

We strongly believe everyone should have access to compassionate and affordable mental health care. For this reason, the Foundation **SUPPORTS SB 974 and urges a FAVORABLE report.**

Thank you for your consideration.

ⁱ Howard County Health Assessment Survey, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.hclhic.org/community/data>

SB 974.pdf

Uploaded by: Pegeen Townsend

Position: FAV



Maryland
Hospital Association

Senate Bill 974- Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees

Position: *Support*

February 28, 2024

Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

MHA Position

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of Senate Bill 974. This bill establishes a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund to sustain and strengthen 988 mental health helpline services in Maryland.

Providing lifesaving counseling and support will certainly improve care and support for Marylanders in behavioral health crisis. 988 has the added benefit of helping to lower utilization of hospital emergency departments.

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 supported Maryland's 988 launch. These state and federal funds run out next year. A permanent source is needed to maintain access to this life-saving service.

Senate Bill 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 988 operations, investments in new technology, and targeted service expansions.

For more information, please contact:

Pegeen Townsend, Consultant

Ptownsend@mhaonline.org

Support SB 974 Behavioral Health Crisis Response S

Uploaded by: Shannon Aleshire

Position: FAV



February 28, 2024

**House Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

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

The Mental Health Association of Frederick County (MHA) is an organization providing prevention, intervention and treatment services in Western Maryland including a 24/7 call center answering 988 and 211, behavioral health walk-in services and supportive services for families such as home visiting, child care resource and referral and advocacy for children in foster care. We urge you to support House Bill 933.

MHA 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.

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.

MHA has been operating a 24/7 call center since 1990. Last year MHA answered 55,000 calls including a call related to suicide every 3-4 hours. This lifesaving work needs and deserves a dedicated funding stream.

MHA urges the Senate Budget and Tax Committee to pass SB 974.

Building a strong foundation of emotional wellness

2024_SB 974_988 Trust Fund Fees_FAVORABLE__AFSP.pd

Uploaded by: Sue Maskaleris

Position: FAV



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

Maryland

February 28, 2024

Sue Maskaleris, MPA (*she/her*)

Waldorf, Maryland

Advocacy Ambassador

[American Foundation for Suicide- Maryland Chapter](#)

Phone: 301-751-8781 Email: smaskaleris@gmail.com

RE: Support SB 974, Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services- 988 Trust Fund Fees

Chair Guzzone and Committee Members:

The **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)** was established in 1987 as a voluntary health organization that gives those affected by suicide a nationwide community empowered by research, education, and advocacy to take action against this leading cause of death. Our mission is to save lives and bring hope to people affected by suicide. AFSP's national headquarters is in New York, with local chapters in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - Maryland Chapter 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.

As of July 2022, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline became operational nationwide. Formerly the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline connects callers to a national network of state and local crisis centers that provide around-the-clock crisis care. Individuals experiencing a suicidal, mental health, or substance use crisis, and those that are worried about someone else, can now call or text 988 or chat with a Lifeline counselor at 988lifeline.org.

In 2022, Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund 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.

At the grass roots level, almost every Marylander who volunteers with AFSP Maryland has been affected in some way by suicide. We have lost loved ones or friends to suicide, we live with mental/behavioral health conditions, and/or we have lived experience after a suicide attempt or suicidal thoughts. We want 988 calls from Maryland residents to be answered quickly and routed to Maryland 988 call centers. Permanent, sustainable funding for the eight Maryland 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline centers is very important for us because we know that quick and easy access to lifeline services saves lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 974. **The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Maryland - Chapter is grateful for your consideration and urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.**

2024_SB 974_988 Trust Fund Fees_FAVORABLE (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Tesia Shi

Position: FAV

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.

SB 974_988 Trust Fund Fees_Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Timothy Jansen

Position: FAV

February 28, 2024

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

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

Community Crisis Services, Inc. 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.

Community Crisis Services, Inc. has been a provider of crisis hotline/suicide prevention services for over 50 years. Community Crisis Services, Inc. was one of the first hotlines to become part of the 9-8-8 Network when it was founded over 25 years ago. This service provides life-saving, resource-connecting services for individuals whose lives may be hanging by a thread 24 hours every day/365 days every year. Individuals can speak about anything they want. They can speak anonymously and work to solve their behavioral and substance use crises in their own ways. These services provide critically needed mental health services to individuals in the moments needed.

Community Crisis Services, Inc. urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.

SB0974 OPC Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: David Lapp

Position: FWA

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BILL NO.: Senate Bill 0974 – Behavioral Health Crisis
Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees

COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation Committee

HEARING DATE: February 28, 2024

SPONSOR: Senator Guzzone

POSITION: Favorable with amendments

The Office of People’s Counsel (“OPC”) supports Senate Bill 974 with the addition of clarifying amendments to ensure that all participants in the federal Lifeline program—not only Lifeline subscribers who purchase prepaid cell phone service—are exempt from the bill’s proposed 9-8-8 fee.

The purpose of SB 974 is to provide a continuous, reliable source of funds for the 9-8-8 Trust Fund and the mental health services it supports. SB 974 will do this by adding a fee of \$0.25 per month to the bills of landline and cell phone telephone service subscribers in Maryland, as well as a one-time fee of \$0.25 to the purchase of prepaid cell phone service.

As introduced, the bill would exempt from the 9-8-8 service fee prepaid cell service customers who participate in the federal Lifeline program, which provides subsidized phone service to low-income households.¹ OPC—which represents the interests of landline service subscribers at the Public Service Commission, as well as the interests of all Lifeline subscribers to the extent that the Commission regulates the

¹ Customers are eligible for the Lifeline program if incomes are below 135 percent of the federal poverty level or if they demonstrate categorical eligibility by virtue of participation in one or more other federal programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA), Veterans Pension or Survivors Pension, and certain Tribal programs.

Lifeline program²—understands that the sponsors of SB 974 intended to also exempt Lifeline participants who subscribe to landline or cell phone service, and that they will propose clarifying amendments to ensure the exemption of all Lifeline participants. With this change, OPC supports SB 974.

As a general rule, OPC disfavors the use of utility rates or charges to fund programs that could be funded more progressively by other measures, such as Maryland’s graduated State income tax. (Household utility rates are generally regressive because all customers pay the same rates and charges regardless of income, and as a result low-income households pay a greater share of their income towards utilities than higher-income households do). Nonetheless, OPC supports SB 974 because (1) the \$0.25 fee is modest, (2) Lifeline customers will be exempt from the fee, and (3) the fee will fund an important service that is available to all customers who pay the fee, as well as to Lifeline customers.

Recommendation: OPC requests a favorable Committee report on SB 974 with the recommended amendments.

² The Public Service Commission regulates landline telephone service in Maryland—also known as “plain old telephone service,” or POTS—but generally does not regulate wireless service. For both landline service and wireless service, however, the Commission determines what telecommunications carriers can qualify as eligible telecommunications carriers for purposes of providing services under the Lifeline program, and OPC represents the interests of both landline and wireless customers with respect to those Commission determinations.