



February 15, 2024

**House Environment and Transportation Committee  
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

*HB 460 – State Highway Administration - Dynamic Message Sign System - Maryland's Helpline*

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, crisis response, 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 supports HB 460 - State Highway Administration - Dynamic Message Sign System - Maryland's Helpline.** HB 460 would help raise awareness of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at no additional cost to the state. The state should work with the Federal Highway Administration and implement the commonsense provisions of HB 460.

988 is a free, 24/7 resource that provides supportive counseling and connection to ongoing resources to anyone who calls or texts. Maryland has effectively adopted the national 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline launched in July 2022 and has provided funding to support implementation. This funding has allowed 988 Lifeline providers to hire staff and improve their systems. The state has also retained some funding to help promote and market 988. BHSB and our partners in the Central Maryland region have also invested in the marketing and promotions of 988. This marketing has been effective with calls increasing over 50% since launch, but a significant number of Marylanders remain unfamiliar with 988.

HB 460 would use the dynamic message sign system administered by the State Highway Administration to further these promotional and public education efforts. Millions of Marylanders pass under these signs each week. A public education campaign about the availability and effectiveness of 988 could be a cost-effective way to raise awareness of 988 and prevent mental health crises from escalating.

Sharing information about 988 could help individuals driving on Maryland’s highways who may be in distress then or at some point in the future. Seeing the number advertised could even save the life of a person or their loved one. The state should do everything it can to raise awareness of this resource.

**BHSB urges the House Environment and Transportation Committee to pass HB 460.**

***For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142***