



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Health and Government Operations

Chair: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk

February 26, 2024

House Bill 0933: Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 0933: 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.

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 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. We urge a favorable report.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
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