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The Honorable Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Chair, Health and Government Operation Committee
Room 241, House Office Building

**RE: Testimony in support of HB 933
Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees**

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and Committee Members:

I write to you in support of HB 933 as a mental health advocate and peer support volunteer who has referred more than 100 individuals to 988 since the number went live in 2022.

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.

Many of the people I refer to 988 feel alone and believe they will face rejection by friends and family if they share their concerns and feelings. It's essential that everyone have 988 to turn to. Just as we all have come to depend on 911, we must be able to rely on 988 to be there when we need it. That's why I urge the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 933.

Sincerely,

Robin Yasinow