



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

Maryland

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Advocacy Ambassador

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RE: Support HB 933, Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services- 988 Trust Fund Fees

Chair Pena-Melnyk 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 HB 933 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.

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.

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 HB 933. **The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - Maryland Chapter is grateful for your consideration and urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to give a favorable report on HB 933.**