

House Health and Government Operations Committee
988 Trust Fund Fees Bill hearing
Wednesday, February 28, 2024

Baltimore City 911:

My name is Tenea Reddick, and I am honored to serve as the 911 Director for the City of Baltimore.

I'm here today to provide testimony in support of House Bill 933, which focuses on the critical partnership between Baltimore City's 911 and the 988 Helpline. This partnership was established following a consent decree with the U.S. Department of Justice in April 2017, prompted by identified issues within the Baltimore City Police Department (BPD) regarding the handling of behavioral health crises. In response to this decree, the city conducted a thorough assessment to pinpoint gaps in the behavioral health service system and propose solutions. As part of our dedication to addressing these gaps and improving support for those experiencing behavioral health crises, we initiated the 911 Diversion Program in June 2021.

The primary goal of this program is to connect individuals experiencing behavioral crises with the most appropriate and available resources when they call for assistance, thereby reducing unnecessary encounters with police, fire, and EMS personnel. To achieve this, 911 diverts behavioral health-related calls to the regional 988 helpline, staffed by trained mental health clinicians who can effectively resolve calls over the phone or dispatch a team of clinician responders.

The partnership between the City of Baltimore and the 988 helpline is crucial because it has the potential to lower public safety costs by diverting calls from 911, thereby averting costs for first responders. Since the program's inception, over a thousand calls have been diverted, saving valuable time for the BPD and BCFD, amounting to well over 500 hours redirected to focus more on emergencies.

We are committed to continuing and expanding this vital work, but to do so, our 988 helpline must be adequately staffed and resourced. Therefore, I urge your support for HB 933, which will enable us to sustain and enhance this critical partnership.

Thank you for your time and consideration.