



February 26, 2024

House Health and Government Operations Committee

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

HB 933 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees

NAMI is the National Alliance on Mental Illness, and NAMI Metropolitan Baltimore is the local affiliate serving our community in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We offer education, support, and advocacy services to help improve the lives of individuals living with mental health conditions, their family members, and communities. We rely on a cadre of nearly 200 volunteers to lead our community programs. They understand mental illness firsthand because they have been there themselves. They use their own experiences to help our program participants work towards recovery. And unfortunately, many of the stories they share include the challenges of accessing crisis services.

NAMI Metropolitan Baltimore 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.

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 when they need it.

Recovery is possible for all individuals living with a mental health condition, but receiving timely, quality services is essential. NAMI Metro Baltimore operates a warm line to help connect residents to resources. When someone calls in crisis, we refer them to 988. Having an easy to remember number greatly aids our callers when getting connected. And knowing that when they call 988, they will be met with caring, immediate help from a trained professional means that calls will be diverted away from police, visits to emergency rooms will be lessened, and our constituents will get the very best care. It is critical that we continue to fund this lifeline for Marylanders.

Maryland has a strong foundation that can be built upon to create the robust 988 network that will keep residents safe and well, but continued investment is needed. **NAMI Metropolitan Baltimore urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 933**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kerry Graves".

Kerry Graves, Executive Director