



January 31, 2024

**House Ways & Means Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 284 – Education – Provision of Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline Telephone Number - Alteration

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment, crisis response, and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports HB284 – Education – Provision of Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline Telephone Number - Alteration. HB284 will ensure students receive up to date information about mental health crisis resources and the 988 Lifeline while not increasing costs for counties. The Senate should support this commonsense legislation.

School-aged children need to have full access to mental health and suicide prevention resources. Tragically, suicide and poor mental health have been on the rise since pandemic among young people, and death suicide has been a leading cause of death among middle and high school-aged children for many years. Free, confidential supports can help young people who are struggling and who may feel hesitant to share their distress with their parents or other authority figures.

The General Assembly recognized the importance of free and confidential crisis supports years ago when they directed counties to share information about the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline with all middle school and high school students through school handbooks and identification cards. Maryland has been a leader over the years in providing crisis resources, and the federal government followed our state’s lead in launching the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in 2022. The 988 Lifeline fulfills the same purpose of the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline and Maryland has transitioned to primarily promoting the 988 network over the Maryland Crisis Youth Hotline. Counselors at 988 call centers have expertise in responding to young people experiencing distress and are the same organizations in most cases that answered the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline. The materials provided through schools should be updated to reflect the transition to 988.

This bill will ensure students have the up to date information they need in the event of a mental health crisis. **BHSB urges the House Ways & Means Committee to pass HB284.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142