



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB 284**  
**Education – Provision of Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline Telephone Number –**  
**Alteration**

Under current law, each county board of education is required to provide middle and high school students with the telephone number of the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline in their school handbooks and on their student identification cards. This legislation replaces the reference to the Youth Crisis Hotline with the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, ensuring that life-saving information is at students' fingertips if they are experiencing a mental health crisis or may be contemplating suicide.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is designated by the Federal Communications Commission as the nationwide number for mental health and suicide crisis intervention services. The hotline was rolled out in 2022 and has made strides in streamlining access to essential mental health services for youth, veterans, LGBTQIA+, and other populations disproportionately impacted by mental health challenges. The hotline receives over 500,000 contacts per month (and rising) and provides services in English and Spanish.

Since the adoption of 988 as the nation's mental health hotline, call volume for the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline (1-800-422-0009) has declined. Its phone number is now used by the Maryland Department of Health as the number for the state's substance use disorder hotline. The Department now refers to 988 as the primary resource for mental health issues.<sup>1</sup>

This bill simply updates state law to reflect these changes in mental health resources. Providers report that 988 is more favored by youth, largely because it has the capacity for text chat and online chat, whereas the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline allows for calls only. Text and online chat have the added benefit of helping students who have disabilities, especially those who are deaf and cannot readily communicate via speech.

Moreover, the simplicity of the three-digit 988 number is paramount in emergency situations, facilitating a quicker response and reducing potential barriers that might arise from the memorization of longer hotline numbers.

Mental health issues among youth are a pressing concern that demands proactive measures. Unfortunately, suicide rates have increased in Maryland by between 6 to 18 percent over the

<sup>1</sup> <https://health.maryland.gov/bha/Pages/HELP.aspx>

last twenty years.<sup>2</sup> Equipping students with easy access to a mental health hotline like 988 can help them navigate the challenges they face and provide them with immediate professional support when needed.

This bill would not add additional costs to schools, as they would not be required to reprint ID cards or handbooks that are already in use. Rather, schools can add the hotline number when new ID cards and handbooks are printed for incoming students in future school years.

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<sup>2</sup> CDC. "Suicide Rising across the US." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 27 Nov. 2018.