



March 6, 2025

Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

SB 599 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program - Funding

The Black Mental Health Alliance (BMHA) exist to promote a holistic, culturally relevant approach to the development and sustainment of mental health programs and services for African Americans and other persons of color. The Black Mental Health Alliance is pleased to support Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988.

The Black Mental Health Alliance strongly supports SB599 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program – Funding. This bill would provide level funding to the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program for the next three years to maintain critical behavioral health care services.

The Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program was established in 2019 to build a more robust behavioral health crisis response system. These types of services provide immediate support when someone is experiencing serious emotional distress or crisis. Crisis services such as mobile crisis teams, urgent care clinics, and crisis residential beds are essential components of the behavioral health care continuum and provide an important alternative to calling 911 or going to the hospital Emergency Department.

The General Assembly mandated \$5 million for the last four years and the Behavioral Health Administration indicated that they plan to maintain it at this level for FY26. This stable funding has been used effectively to serve thousands of children and adults experiencing a crisis. It is also a smart investment that saves the state money in the long run by preventing higher hospital and criminal justice costs. Hospital EDs and the criminal justice system are not the appropriate setting to help resolve a crisis or help someone to stabilize. They are chaotic and not designed with mental health crises in mind. They are also expensive. The alternative interventions that are funded by this program must be maintained, especially considering the struggles the state continues to have with pediatric hospital overstay and lengthy ED wait times.

Maryland has a strong foundation that must be maintained. Our robust 988 network keeps residents safe and well, but continued investment is needed. Why is this so important? The public demand is increasing. The Black Mental Health Alliance encourages the utilization of such a critical resource. CALL 988 is a helpline that offers free and confidential emergency emotional support from mental health specialists, 24/7.

Continuing funding for the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program is a smart investment. The Black Mental Health Alliance **urges the Senate Budget & Taxation Committee to pass SB599.**