



February 4, 2022

**Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 293 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—9-8-8 Trust Fund

Baltimore Crisis Response, Inc. (BCRI) is the city's first comprehensive crisis center providing 24-hour access to hotline services. Since 1992 BCRI has provided mental health and substance use services for individuals regardless of their ability to pay. The mission is to provide timely and effective community based services in the least restrictive environment. All services are initiated through our 24/7 Here 2 Help Hotline, which also operates the Local lifeline.

Johnathan Davis CEO, Baltimore Crisis Response Inc. is pleased to support HB 293 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—9-8-8 Trust Fund. This bill designates 988 to be the phone number for Maryland's suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis hotline and establishes a sustainable funding source to support existing behavioral health crisis call centers in Maryland.

Congress designated 988 as the new phone number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The 988 line will go live July 2022 and all telephone companies will begin to route call to local call centers that are joined to the lifeline network. The local crisis call centers provide 24/7 free, confidential emotional support to people calling for help. It is expected that calls to the Lifeline will significantly increase when the new number goes live and Maryland needs to ensure that its existing eight local call centers are adequately resourced to support this influx of calls for help.

Since 2007, BCRI has been an active call center and strongly believes in 988's goal to provide free confidential emotional support 24 hours a day across the United states. Baltimore Crisis Response Inc. received 127,632 calls from January 2020 to December 2021 from individuals seeking support. The HB 293 Behavioral Health Crisis Response-9-8-8 Trust bill is vital to maintain a robust and trained workforce that are instrumental to promoting community wellness.

Maryland has the unique opportunity to align with national efforts to improve access to crisis care by designating 988 as the number for our state's behavioral health crisis hotline and ensuring adequate funding to support local crisis call centers. **Johnathan Davis CEO, Baltimore Crisis Response Inc. urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 293.**

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