

February 8, 2022

**Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

SB 241 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—9-8-8 Trust Fund

***Presbyterians for Police Transformation
Takoma Park Presbyterian Church Takoma Park, Md 20912***

Presbyterians for Police Transformation is pleased to support SB 241 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 the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In July 2022, 988 will go live. Beginning then, all phone companies will route 988 calls to local crisis call centers that are part of 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.

We have been studying and advocating for changes in the way mental health emergencies are handled to reduce the involvement of police. In the US people in a mental health crisis are more likely to interact with police than treatment providers and incidences of violence and death are much more frequent in these police interventions especially for people of color. A funded response capacity for 988 calls will contribute to this goal.

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. ***Presbyterians for Police Transformation urges the Senate Finance Committee to pass SB 241.***

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