

February 8, 2022

**Senate Finance Committee  
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

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

Independence Now, The Freedom Center, The IMAGE Center, and Accessible Resources for Independence are disability resource and advocacy organizations run by and for people with disabilities.

**The above-named organizations are 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.

People with disabilities often face significant barriers to obtaining social services. A consolidated system of local crisis call centers will ensure that people with disabilities are able to easily reach mental health professionals should a crisis arise.

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. **Independence Now, The Freedom Center, The IMAGE Center, and Accessible Resources for Independence urges the Senate Finance Committee to pass SB 241.**

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

