



March 27, 2024

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and distinguished members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses, their families, and the wider community.

In 2022, Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund to provide dedicated funding for 988—but no permanent funding source was established at that time. SB974 creates this permanent funding mechanism through a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee, which is modeled after Maryland's current 911 funding structure. This would generate \$15-20 million annually to support current 988 operations, investments in new technology, and targeted service expansions. This dedicated funding is essential to meet increasingly strict federal 988 standards and ensure Marylanders can access 988 for lifesaving counselling and support when they need it.

There are 781,000 Marylanders with a mental health condition and 181,000 with a serious mental illness. A priority of NAMI MD is to ensure adequate funding to support programs to reach this target population. The goal of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is to provide immediate crisis intervention and support. When someone contacts 988, a trained crisis counselor will answer, listen to the person, provide support, and share resources as needed. Crisis counselors are trained to help in a variety of crisis situations.

We need 24/7 local crisis call centers to meet the demands in every community with these trained staff who can connect people to local services, dispatch mobile crisis teams, and schedule follow-up appointments with local providers. To achieve this, we need the money to fund the training, call centers, the 9-8-8-call number and facilities required for these critical services. 79% of Marylanders agree that they would be willing to pay an extra \$0.25 a month on their phone bill for the 9-8-8 helpline.

NAMI MD is committed to advancing efforts to reimagine crisis response in our State. Funding 988 is the first step in reimagining our crisis response. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

Kathryn S. Farinholt  
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