



Greater Washington Society for Clinical Social Work

TO: The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair
Members, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
The Honorable Guy Guzzone

FROM: Judith Gallant, LCSW-C, Director, GWSCSW Legislation and Advocacy

DATE: February 28, 2024

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 974 – *Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees*

The Greater Washington Society for Clinical Social Work (GWSCSW) was established in 1975 to promote and advance the specialization of clinical practice within the social work profession. Through our lobbying, education, community building, and social justice activities, we affirm our commitment to the needs of those in our profession, their clients, and the community at large. On behalf of GWSCSW, we **support** Senate Bill 974.

This bill establishes a permanent funding source for the 9-8-8 Trust Fund to sustain and strengthen 9-8-8 mental health helpline services in Maryland. Maryland established the 9-8-8 Trust Fund in 2022 to provide dedicated funding for 9-8-8, but no permanent funding source was established at that time. Instead, federal grants and state general revenue funds have supported Maryland's 9-8-8 launch. These state and federal funds run out next year. Maryland's 9-8-8 network needs a permanent funding source to address this fiscal cliff.

Senate Bill 974 would create this permanent funding mechanism through a \$0.25 per month 9-8-8 telecom fee modeled after Maryland's current 9-1-1 funding structure. This would generate \$15-20 million annually to support current 9-8-8 operations, investments in new technology, and targeted service expansions. This dedicated funding is essential to meet increasingly strict federal 9-8-8 standards and ensure Marylanders can access 9-8-8 for lifesaving counseling and support when they need it. **We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 974.**

For more information call:

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