



**Mission:** *To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy*

**Vision:** *Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities*

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**SB0974: Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees**

**Hearing Date: 02/28/24**

**Committee: Budget and Taxation**

**Position: SUPPORT**

Chair Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of SB0974. The Maryland Public Health Association is pleased to support SB0974: Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees. This bill establishes a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund to sustain and strengthen 988 mental health helpline services in Maryland.

Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund in 2022 to provide dedicated funding for 988, but no permanent funding source was established at that time. The General Assembly appropriated \$17.5 million for the 988 Trust Fund over two years<sup>1</sup>. These state and federal funds run out next year. Maryland's 988 network needs a permanent funding source to address this fiscal cliff.

To assist states with their funding responsibilities, Congress authorized the use of a telecom fee to sustain and build their 988 and crisis response system. All 50 states use a 911 telecom fee to fund their 911 systems and a similar funding mechanism can be used to build a high-quality and robust 988 system. Eight states have enacted a 988 telecom fee so far including Virginia and Delaware.<sup>2</sup>

HB 933 would create this permanent funding mechanism through a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee 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.<sup>2</sup> This dedicated funding is essential to meet increasingly strict federal 988 standards and ensure Marylanders can access 988 for lifesaving counseling and support when they need it. The Maryland Public Health Association urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB0974.

*The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.*

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<sup>1</sup> Fund MD 988 Campaign: The Plan to Sustainably Fund the Maryland 988 Trust Fund.

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<sup>2</sup> Fund MD 988 Campaign: Support HB0933/SB0974 For a Strong 988 Helpline in Maryland.

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