



TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF SENATE BILL 974
Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees
Before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
By Lyla Martin, Intern, Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative
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Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the House HGO Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 974, which would establish a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund to sustain and strengthen 988 mental health helpline services in Maryland. We especially thank Chair Guzzone for sponsoring this critical legislation.

Our mission is to advocate for policies that ensure access to quality, affordable health care for all Marylanders. Maryland communities need mental health support more than ever and investing in the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a critical way to provide that support. In 2022 Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund to provide dedicated funding for 988, but no permanent funding source was established at that time. Instead, federal grants and state general revenue funds have supported Maryland's 988 launch. Unfortunately, these state and federal funds will end next year. Maryland's 988 network needs a permanent funding source to address this fiscal cliff.

SB 974 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. 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.

Maryland has one of the top five health care systems in the U.S., and this legislation will help Maryland continue to lead the nation. We urge a favorable report for SB 974.