

Senate Bill 974 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – 988 Trust Fund

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

February 28, 2024

Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of SB 974.

SB 974 creates a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund by establishing a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee.

988 is a critical and potentially lifesaving statewide resource for individuals in need of mental health support, as well as their families, and it is a key part of the crisis services continuum of care. Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund in 2022 to provide dedicated funding for 988. Federal grants and state general revenue funds have supported Maryland's 988's launch. These state and federal funds run out next year, while calls and texts to 988 have increased dramatically and continue to grow. Maryland's 988 network needs a permanent funding source.

For children and youth who are experiencing mental health distress or a crisis, 988 is especially important to prevent trips to the emergency department and inpatient hospitalizations, both of which can be extremely detrimental to a child's mental health (and are often unnecessary).¹ And 988 is needed now more than ever by Maryland's youth.

For over a decade the mental health of children and youth has been worsening. In the 10 years leading up to the COVID pandemic, depression increased by about 40% in young people,² and the mental health of youth deteriorated dramatically in the wake of the pandemic. Maryland youth have not been immune to these trends. Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 2021-22 shows that 29% of Maryland high school students and 23% of middle school students reported that their mental health was not good most of the time or always.³

¹ Michael A. Hoge et al. Emergency department use by children and youth with mental health conditions: a health equity agenda. *Community Mental Health Journal* (2022). Accessed February 25, 2024.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8762987/>

² Kids' mental health is in crisis. Here's what psychologists are doing to help. American Academy of Pediatrics. January 1, 2023. Accessed January 14, 2023. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/01/trends-improving-youth-mental-health>

³ Maryland Department of Health releases 2021-2022 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey and Youth Tobacco Survey data. Maryland Department of Health. March 3, 2023. Accessed January 14, 2023. <https://health.maryland.gov/newsroom/Pages/Maryland-Department-of-Health-releases-2021-2022-Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey-and-Youth-Tobacco-Survey-data.aspx#:~:text=More%20than%20one%2Dthird%20of,or%20always.%20Female%20students%20were>

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Historically, families have called 911 or taken their child to the emergency department when they felt that their child was experiencing a mental health crisis. The worsening mental health of children has led to an explosion in hospital emergency department utilization, which has resulted in children and adolescents becoming stuck there.⁴ Yet most of the time, when a family reaches out for help, their child does not need to be seen in an emergency department or hospitalized, unless there is an accompanying medical emergency.

By calling 988, instead of calling 911 or going to the emergency department, families can access appropriate mental health assistance over the phone, and, if needed, have a mobile crisis team dispatched to them. This is usually sufficient and far preferable for everyone.

In addition, children and youth themselves can call 988 to talk to someone and potentially avert a crisis. Even better, they can text 988 (Maryland needs greater capacity for this, however), which is the preferred way of communicating for many youth.

988 is a vital component of community health and wellbeing. As such, it needs an adequate and dedicated funding source. A \$0.25 telecom fee is a sensible way to support this critical community service.

For this reason, MHAMD supports SB 974 and urges a favorable report.

⁴ The Baltimore Banner. Maryland kids in distress are being kept in emergency departments for weeks, months. (August 9, 2023). Accessed February 13, 2023. <https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/community/public-health/hundreds-of-maryland-children-live-in-hospitals-FCLWTVRAZFARHKCP74RP5EFJNQ/>