

**Senate Bill 974**  
**Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees**  
Budget & Taxation Committee  
February 28, 2024  
**Support**

**Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports SB 974**, which establishes a \$0.25 per month fee on services like regular phone lines and cell phone plans and on certain retail transactions, to fund the 9-8-8 Trust Fund, the designated national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline number.

For a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

**Since its launch in July 2022, the 988 service has received and routed approximately 8.6 million calls, texts, and chats.**<sup>1</sup> The implementation of the 988 service marked a critical milestone in providing essential crisis support to individuals across the United States. With the simple access of dialing or texting 988, or engaging in chat support through 988lifeline.org, individuals in distress or those concerned about loved ones can connect with trained counselors 24/7.

**This universal entry point ensures that help is accessible regardless of one's location, offering immediate assistance for a range of mental health-related issues, including suicidal thoughts, emotional distress, and substance use crises.** However, the urgent need for this service is underscored by alarming statistics highlighting the prevalence of mental health crises in our nation. With an increase in drug overdoses, it is evident that too many individuals are suffering without adequate support.<sup>1</sup> The 988 Lifeline serves as a beacon of hope, providing vital intervention and support to thousands of individuals daily. **Therefore, it is imperative that we prioritize funding for this crucial program to ensure that individuals in crisis receive the care and support they desperately need.**

As the second largest behavioral health provider in Maryland, our ability to effectively connect with clients is paramount to delivering quality care. **The establishment of a dedicated funding stream through subscriber fees, as proposed in SB 974, ensures that individuals experiencing mental health crises, including our clients, have immediate access to vital resources and assistance.** This seamless connection to crisis supports services not only reinforces our commitment to meeting the evolving needs of our community but also strengthens our ability to provide timely intervention and support to those who need it.

**For these reasons, Catholic Charities urges the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 974.**

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy

1. 988 Lifeline Performance Metrics. www.samhsa.gov. <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/performance-metrics>