



Life Crisis Center, Inc.
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February 28, 2024

SB 974 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

February 27, 2024

Testimony of Life Crisis Center

Position: Support

Dear Chairman:

The Life Crisis Center, Inc. (LCC) provides trauma specific therapy, shelter, legal services, 24/7 crisis intervention, and case management for survivors of sexual assault, sexual and physical child abuse, child sexual assault, interpersonal violence and human sex trafficking in Worcester, Somerset and Wicomico Counties. We additionally provide 24/7 hotline services through 988 and 211 Maryland for the 9 counties on the Shore.

Life Crisis Center is pleased to support SB 974 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. Instead, federal grants and state general revenue funds have supported Maryland's 988 launch. These state and federal funds run out next year. Maryland's 988 network needs a permanent funding source to address this fiscal cliff.

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. 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.

To improve the quality of life in our community through crisis intervention and violence prevention
A United Way Agency Serving Wicomico, Worcester, & Somerset Counties

Demands for resources through 988 greatly increased during this year. These counties of the Shore are primarily rural and lack many resources available to the more metropolitan areas. Our hotline numbers have grown from 38,000 to 48,000 in the past year and the resources we provide are critical and lifesaving. The calls are almost exclusively complex trauma with multiple layers of complicated factors such as poverty, isolation and addictions leading many to want to find an end. The very heart of our work is mission driven. Life Crisis Center never charges for any of our services so this secure funding allows our crisis specialist the ability to be there for Marylanders and provide trauma informed support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Life Crisis Center urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jamie Manning". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jamie Manning, LCSW-C, CNP
Executive Director