



**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

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

Totally Linking Care in Maryland (TLC-MD) is a nonprofit coalition of 6 hospitals that connects healthcare providers and programs with residents in Southern Maryland (Calvert County, Charles County, Prince George’s County, and St. Mary’s County). We believe that everyone deserves access to quality healthcare.

We build innovative health programs through grant funding and sustain them through public/private partnerships. Our goal is to simplify how residents access healthcare, one program at a time, to help them become the healthiest version of themselves. We do this by breaking down barriers to health care services and building bridges between hospitals, healthcare professionals, faith-based organizations, and, most importantly, the residents of our community.

Totally Linking Care in Maryland (TLC-MD) 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.

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.

This telecom fee will support sustainability for a service that is vital for the State of Maryland. This bill is important to TLC-MD for several reasons. TLC-MD is leading the implementation of the crisis continuum in Prince George’s County that includes 911, 988, Mobile Response, Crisis Stabilization, and Outpatient Services. In most cases 988 will be the entry /first point of contact for individuals who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis. 988 call specialists will stabilize, refer, facilitate services being delivered to individuals in crisis and connect them to the most appropriate level of care. 988 helps reduce costs for the State of Maryland, by often diverting individuals in crisis from higher levels of care. 988 is best practice for behavioral health crisis services in the United States, and Maryland deserves the best practice.

Totally Linking Care in Maryland (TLC-MD) urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 974.