

February 28, 2024

Testimony on Senate Bill 974
Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Position: Favorable

Maryland Nonprofits is a statewide association of almost 1800 nonprofit organizations and institutions. We urge you to support Senate Bill 974 to establish 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.

Senate Bill 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.

The availability of timely behavioral health care in times of crisis is critical to reduce physical harm or dangers, and the unnecessary diversion and costs of police or other first responder time and resources, often including emergency room services.

We urge you to give Senate Bill 974 a favorable report.