



February 28, 2024

**House Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 933 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees

The Mental Health Association of Frederick County (MHA) is an organization providing prevention, intervention and treatment services in Western Maryland including a 24/7 call center answering 988 and 211, behavioral health walk-in services and supportive services for families such as home visiting, child care resource and referral and advocacy for children in foster care. We urge you to support House Bill 933.

MHA is pleased to support HB 933 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.

MHA has been operating a 24/7 call center since 1990. Last year MHA answered 55,000 calls including a call related to suicide every 3-4 hours. This lifesaving work needs and deserves a dedicated funding stream.

MHA urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 933.

Building a strong foundation of emotional wellness