

February 28, 2024

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

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

Community Crisis Services, inc. (CCSI) is a nonprofit organization that operates as a 988 crisis center serving callers and chat visitors from southern Maryland, and is part of the 988 regional backup, Spanish, and video phone subnetworks. Through these subnetworks, CCSI provides backup coverage to other 988 centers in other parts of the nation, supports Spanish speakers with a team of trained bilingual specialists, and supports individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing with a team of specialists fluent in American Sign Language. In partnership with Prince George’s County 911 services, CCSI also answers calls diverted from 911 in which callers may be experiencing a mental health crisis but do not require immediate dispatch from emergency personnel. CCSI has 988 and other telephonic crisis intervention services available 24/7.

**Community Crisis Services, Inc 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.

Additional 988 funding would allow for CCSI to expand proactive quality assurance procedures, supporting further consistency and efficacy to the services provided. It would also allow us to invest in our staff, building a structure for staff retention and development. Increased funding would also allow us to invest further in our bilingual hotline team, providing special support for our Spanish 988 workers, who have seen the largest volume increase since the switch to 988.

**Community Crisis Services, Inc urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 933.**