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Chairperson McNamara and members of the House Education committee,

My name is Dayna Gladstein, and I am the President and CEO of Newport Mental Health. I am submitting testimony in support of HB7026, The Nathan Bruno and Jason Flatt Act, and its companion legislation in the Senate, SB2348. This bill represents a sensible step towards a safer future for the students and educators of Rhode Island, providing them with an additional chance to remember that someone is available and willing to listen when they need it. We also support the addition of the Sub-A language, providing a clearer timeline for enacting this critical work.

By requiring the inclusion of 988 on student and staff ID's, we take a small step with a big impact. As a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC), and one that works closely with the team that operates Rhode Island's 988 crisis line, we know firsthand the impact an emergency line can have. CCBHC's serve a major role as part of the behavioral health safety net in Rhode Island, and that work is supported by the team at the 988 Crisis line. Since the line went live back in 2022, our state has had one of the best in-state answer rates in the country. When someone calls for help, no matter how big or small the crisis is, they can be assured there will be someone on the other end of that line. And that they will be connected to that network of care quickly and in a way that is informed by their unique situation. These systems are part of the whole that make sure Rhode Islanders are kept safe and supported in their time of need.

This bill hits close to home for us, as it focuses on Nathan Bruno, a Portsmouth resident who took his own life in 2018. Our team serves the community in Portsmouth. We are there when the community grieves, and we are there as they navigate day to day. Any resource that makes their lives easier and provides an effective way to connect the most vulnerable among us with services when and where they need them is a clear victory in policy.

While it may not reach your committee, I also urge senators to support upcoming legislation that will establish stable funding for the 988 line, ensuring this bill remains a thoughtful and proactive investment in the safety of Rhode Island's future.

For those reasons, I urge the committee to support this legislation and reiterate its commitment to the health and wellbeing of the students and educators of Rhode Island.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Dayna Gladstein,

LICSW President & CEO



Newport Mental Health