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April 18, 2025

Dear Speaker Shekarchi and Senator DiPalma,

I am writing to support long-term funding for the state's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline through the already established 911 and first responder surcharge on mobile phones.

In October 2020, Congress passed legislation, co-authored by Rhode Island's own Senator Jack Reed, creating the new 988 behavioral health hotline. The vision of 988 was to have an easy to remember phone number that gave Rhode Islanders **someone to talk to** (24/7 crisis call centers), **someone to respond** (mobile crisis response teams), and **somewhere to go** (crisis respite and stabilization centers) when in crisis.

Rhode Island's 988 and BH Link hotline has answered over 65,000 calls and boasts a 98% in-state answer rate, one of the best in the country. The Rhode Island speed to answer time of 2 seconds means that callers are getting immediate and swift attention.

The importance of 988 cannot be overstated. Continued funding will allow for the expansion of call center staffing and chat functionalities, ensuring more people in need can access help quickly and effectively. 988 has the potential to divert many calls from 911, reducing the

burden on emergency services, allowing them to focus on true public safety emergencies and offer a more appropriate response for those experiencing mental health crises.

Investing in the 988 program is an investment in all of Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Chief Thomas F. Oates III