



May 22, 2025

Dear Chair Abney and Members, House Finance Committee,

Re: Support for H6128

On behalf of the Senior Agenda Coalition of Rhode Island (SACRI), I am pleased to support H6128, AN ACT RELATING TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND HOSPITALS -- CORE STATE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS SERVICES SYSTEMS-988 introduced by Representatives Shallcross Smith, Hull, Corvese, Lombardi, Batista, Solomon, Casimiro, Fell Ela, Casey and Cruz

SACRI'S mission is to mobilize people to implement an agenda that improves the quality of life of older Rhode Islanders and adults with disabilities and their family caregivers. We accomplish this through *community organizing, public education, advocacy, and legislative action*. Promoting older persons health, both physical and mental, is a priority for SACRI.

H6128 establishes a long-term, and sustained, funding source for the state's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. In 2020 Congress passed legislation, co-authored by Rhode Island Senator Jack Reed, calling for 988. However, it is an unfunded federal mandate and while our state has one of the best in-state answer rates (98%) in the country, we need state legislation to ensure that this critical lifeline for all Rhode Island residents is fully funded each year with room to expand the 988 vision of "someone to talk to, someone to respond, and somewhere to go." The bill would direct monies from the already established 911 and first responder surcharges on mobile phones to include funding the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. This legislation does not enact any new fees or taxes as the 911 and first responder fees are currently in place and the state is already collecting monies for Rhode Island's first responder needs including 911.

Why is this important for older adults and adults with disabilities?

Data from the 2025 RI Healthy Aging Data report shows that one-third of persons age 65 and over have a diagnosis of depression (35%) or anxiety (34%). The ease of access to 988 can lessen the historic stigma surrounding mental health issues especially for older persons whose mental health issues are often overlooked and compounded by ageism. 988 can dispatch skilled responders to provide in-person assistance during a crisis. It also encourages those with mental health issues to seek help promoting early intervention by connecting callers to trained professionals who can listen, provide support and offer resources.

SACRI appreciates your consideration of our support and asks that you consider recommendation of passage of H6128.

Sincerely,
Carol Costa, Executive Director
SACRI