



May 20th, 2025

ATTN: Chairperson Abney
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island House

RE: In support of House Bill, **HB6128**

Dear Chairperson Abney and Members of the House Finance committee,

My name is Dayna Gladstein, LICSW, and I am the President and CEO of Newport Mental Health in Middletown, RI. I would like to include my written testimony in support of **HB6128** (as well as its companion Senate bill, **S0892**) which would establish a long-term and sustained funding source for the state's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

988 is a lifesaving resource. Since launching in July 2022, it's become easier than ever for people in crisis to get immediate help. Whether they're struggling with mental health, substance use, or emotional distress there is now an accessible option just a few clicks away. Here in Rhode Island, over 65,000 calls have already been answered, with one of the fastest response times in the country – just 2 seconds on average – and a 98% in-state answer rate. With this service as it stands, Rhode Islanders are getting local support, faster than ever, when they need it most.

This impact is felt directly at Newport Mental Health through our Rhode Island Outreach (RIO) team. The RIO team responds not only to calls made to our internal crisis line but also to 988 calls received across Newport County and the East Bay. This additional point of contact supports a critical function of the service—helping to reduce unnecessary hospitalizations and de-escalate crises in the community. By providing continued access, we strengthen an already life-saving service here and deepen our connection with those we serve.

The only way to keep up with growing demand for this service is sustainable funding. The 988 program is currently an unfunded federal mandate, and this bill provides a smart solution: using existing 911 and first responder surcharge funds—without raising any new taxes or fees.

988 has already helped thousands of Rhode Islanders. With proper investment, we can help thousands more. We can expand capacity, enhance chat functionalities, and ensure rapid response times remain the norm—not the exception. This is not just a health issue, it's a public safety issue, an economic issue, and a moral imperative.

I urge you to support **HB6128** and its partner legislation **S0892** and ensure that the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline remains a reliable, accessible resource for every Rhode Islander in need—today and into the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Dayna Gladstein, LICSW
President & CEO