

May 22, 2025

The Honorable Marvin Abney
House Committee on Finance
82 Smith St., Providence, RI, 02903

SUPPORT H6128

To The Honorable Marvin Abney and House Finance Committee Members:

On behalf of the Community Provider Network of Rhode Island, I submit this testimony in strong support of **House Bill 6128**, legislation that would establish a long-term, sustainable funding mechanism for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in our state.

988 is not just a number, it is a life-saving tool.

Since its launch, Rhode Island has demonstrated leadership in crisis response. Our state's call centers have answered more than 65,000 calls, with a 98% in-state answer rate—one of the highest in the nation—and an average response time of just 2 seconds. These are not just numbers; they represent thousands of lives touched, redirected, and, in many cases, saved.

For the disability community, the availability of timely and specialized crisis support is especially critical. People with disabilities, particularly those with co-occurring mental health challenges, often face barriers in accessing appropriate care. 988 helps fill this gap by providing immediate, low-barrier access to compassionate, trained professionals who can de-escalate situations, offer support, and connect individuals with necessary resources—without defaulting to emergency departments or law enforcement, which may not be equipped to respond appropriately.

H6128 offers a solution to an urgent need.

While our state has built an exemplary crisis response infrastructure, its continued success depends on stable, long-term funding. H6128 provides just that—by directing a portion of the revenue already collected from existing 911 and first responder surcharges on mobile phones to



include support for the 988 Lifeline. This approach requires no new taxes or fees and uses existing resources to meet a pressing and growing public health need.

We view this as an investment in the health and safety of all Rhode Islanders. Supporting H6128 means ensuring that:

- Every person in crisis has someone to talk to—24/7.
- A trained team can be dispatched to respond when needed.
- A safe place is available for those who require immediate care.

988 ensures timely access to mental health support, helping individuals in distress get the help they need before situations escalate into acute crises. By diverting non-emergency mental health calls from hospitals and emergency rooms, 988 reduces strain on healthcare systems and allows resources to be focused where they're needed most.

988 is more than a number—it is the cornerstone of a comprehensive crisis care system. Fully funding it means fewer lives lost, and a more compassionate, inclusive approach to behavioral health and disability services in our state.

We urge you to pass H6128 and secure the future of this vital service for all Rhode Islanders—especially those in our disability community who are too often overlooked in crisis response systems. Thank you for your attention and your commitment to mental health equity.

Sincerely,

Grace Duffy | Policy Coordinator

Community Provider Network of Rhode Island

1130 Ten Rod Road, Suite F101 | North Kingstown, Rhode Island 02852

gduffy@cpnri.org | 401-523-5653

