



Letter of Support for 988 Long Term Funding

May 21, 2025

Dear Speaker Shekarchi and Rep Shallcross-Smith,

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

As the President and CEO of Horizon Pharmacy, I recognize the critical importance of ensuring that Rhode Islanders have access to behavioral health crisis resources when they need them the most. Horizon Pharmacy is a closed-door long-term care pharmacy owned by, and collaborating with, behavioral health centers. In many instances, the availability of an answered call can be a matter of life or death.

In October 2020, Congress passed legislation co-authored by Rhode Island's own Senator Jack Reed, establishing the new 988 behavioral health hotline. The vision behind 988 was to provide Rhode Islanders with an easy-to-remember phone number that offers continuous access to crisis call centers (**someone to talk to**), mobile crisis response teams (**someone to respond**), and crisis respite and stabilization centers (**somewhere to go**) during times of crisis.

Rhode Island's 988 and BH Link hotline has successfully answered over 65,000 calls and boasts an impressive 98% in-state answer rate, one of the highest rates in the country. The average answer time of just 2 seconds ensures that callers receive immediate and swift attention.

The significance of the 988 programs cannot be overstated. Sustained funding will allow for the expansion of call center staffing and chat functionalities, ensuring that more individuals in need can access assistance promptly and effectively. The 988 program holds the potential to divert numerous calls from the 911 system, thereby reducing the burden on emergency services and enabling them to concentrate on genuine public safety emergencies while providing a more appropriate response for those experiencing mental health crises.

Investing in the 988 program is an investment in the well-being of all Rhode Islanders.

Best,

Jason Dana Costa
President and CEO

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President & CEO

Megan J. McCaskill
Director of
Pharmacy Operations

Justin Gharavi
Pharmacist-In-Charge

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