



May 22, 2025

The Honorable Representative Marvin L. Abney  
Chair of the House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for House Bill 6128 – 988 Suicide Prevention & Crisis Lifeline

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

Thank you for your support for and investment in Rhode Island's behavioral healthcare system. Crisis services are an important part of our system, and they save lives. On behalf of the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island (MHARI), I am writing to express our support for House Bill 6128, legislation that seeks to secure sustainable funding for the state's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

988 is a federally mandated, but unfunded, initiative designed to ensure timely access to suicide prevention and mental health crisis services. Since its launch in July 2022, the Rhode Island 988 and BH Link hotline has answered over 65,000 calls, providing immediate, life-saving support to individuals in distress. The state currently boasts an in-state answer rate of 98% and an average speed to answer of just 2 seconds—far surpassing national standards—and among the best in the country.

However, despite these impressive outcomes, 988 remains without a designated, long-term funding source. The legislation proposed in House Bill 6128 would redirect surplus funds from the 911 emergency services surcharge—funds already collected through existing cell phone surcharges—to support 988 operations. This proposal does not introduce any new taxes or fees but simply allocates unspent resources to an equally critical component of public safety.

988 is more than a phone number. It is the foundation of a comprehensive crisis response system, offering someone to talk to, someone to respond, and somewhere to go. As more Rhode Islanders become aware of 988, demand will continue to grow. Ensuring continued funding will help expand staffing, improve chat/text response times, and solidify crisis response capabilities.

Thousands of Rhode Islanders depend on 988, and continued investment is essential to saving lives and easing the burden on our emergency response systems. Thank you for your leadership and for considering this important measure. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Respectfully,

Laurie-Marie Pisciotta  
Executive Director