

Representative Marvin Abney, Chairman
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

May 22, 2025

Dear Representative Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony in support of H6128, the bill to ensure funding for the state's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. My name is Melissa Ames, and I am a volunteer and advocate for the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Our volunteer-led chapter of AFSP is here to save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide -- through research, education, advocacy, and support to our Rhode Island community.

Words can't describe the way you feel when you loss someone so close to you to suicide. I will never forget the day I found out Johnnie my friend of 24 years was gone, just a normal morning of routine school drop off, starting work and then about 10:00 am finding out "Did you hear about Johnnie"? My reaction "Did I hear what?" I had just talked to Johnnie three day's prior, and I had just seen him two weeks prior at my 40th Birthday party. I called my friend, and I just couldn't comprehend what she was saying. As the day went on confirmation to everyone, I talked too became reality. Johnnie was gone! The day became the longest day possible it was like time had stopped. The only problem was it didn't. I still had to do everything as if it was a normal day. The only thing was this was no normal day. The days leading up to saying goodbye to someone I had known for 24 years seemed to be unthinkable but somehow, we all survived. The week's that followed felt like I was doing everything in slow motion and just trying to process everything.

We lost our friend Johnnie on June 1st, 2015. It has been 10 years since he took his life, and it still doesn't feel like reality. There is no time limit on grief, however having 988 and the services 988 offers in our state could have saved Johnnie. Johnnie was struggling with depression and thought he was alone 988 offers and outlet for support to those that are struggling and feeling alone.

It's estimated that between two to six percent of people in the world have experienced depression in the past year.

Adults (ages 44-54) had the highest rate of suicide from 2010-2016 nationally and in Rhode Island.

Males in Rhode Island continue to be more likely than females to die by suicide.

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for ages 35-44 in Rhode Island.

Between January and February of this year, 1,991 calls to 988 were routed to Rhode Island, a 90% increase compared to the same time frame just two years earlier. Lifeline evaluations and caller feedback show crisis counselors effectively reduce distress and suicidality and help tens of thousands of people get through crises daily. Most callers are deescalated over the phone, with links made to in-person services when needed.

Nationally, an average of 10% of law enforcement agencies' total budgets and 21% of total staff time is spent responding to and transporting those with mental health conditions. Full implementation and promotion of 988 will reduce healthcare spending with early intervention, reduce the burden on emergency rooms and law enforcement, and improve outcomes for individuals experiencing a suicide or behavioral health crisis.

We all have a role to play in preventing suicide, and with your support, passage of this legislation will affirm Rhode Island's commitment to improving the lives of our residents and preventing the tragic loss of life to suicide in the future. We must continue to bring HOPE to our communities.

Sincerely,

Melissa Ames

Providence County

