



Washington County Coalition for Children

To: Chairman Rep. Marvin Abney and the House Finance Committee

Date: May 22, 2025

RE: **Support for H6128** - Establishing a core state behavioral health crisis services system

I write on behalf of the Washington County Coalition in **strong support of H6128**, which establishes sustainable funding for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in Rhode Island. This is a critical investment in our state's mental health infrastructure — one that will save lives, particularly among young people, who are facing an alarming rise in mental health crises.

We are in the midst of a youth mental health emergency. More young people are struggling with anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts than ever before. In these moments of pain, access to immediate help matters. The 988 Lifeline provides that help — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, connecting Rhode Islanders in crisis to trained professionals who can listen, deescalate, and guide them to care.

In the first two months of 2025 alone, nearly 2,000 calls were routed to Rhode Island crisis centers through 988, a 90% increase from two years ago. That number represents real people who stayed on the line long enough to find hope, a parent who didn't have to navigate a mental health emergency alone, a life that didn't end in tragedy.

H6128 ensures that 988 can continue to serve our state, without delay or without disruption. It taps into existing mobile phone surcharge funds for emergency response services to provide a stable, long-term solution to fund the 988 crisis continuum. Without sustainable funding, the state's crisis hotline and response system are at risk. And if we let it falter, the cost will be counted in lives lost, particularly among our youth who often turn to 988 because they don't feel safe or seen anywhere else. This is our chance to show them that they are not alone and when they reach out, Rhode Island will answer.

We urge you to pass H6128 and ensure every Rhode Islander has someone to call, someone to respond, and a path toward safety and healing.

Sincerely,

Robert Hicks

Volunteer Lobbyist