

May 12, 2026

Lauren Weinstock, PhD
40 Carriage Lane
Kingston, RI 02881

RE: Bill H8177, IN FAVOR OF

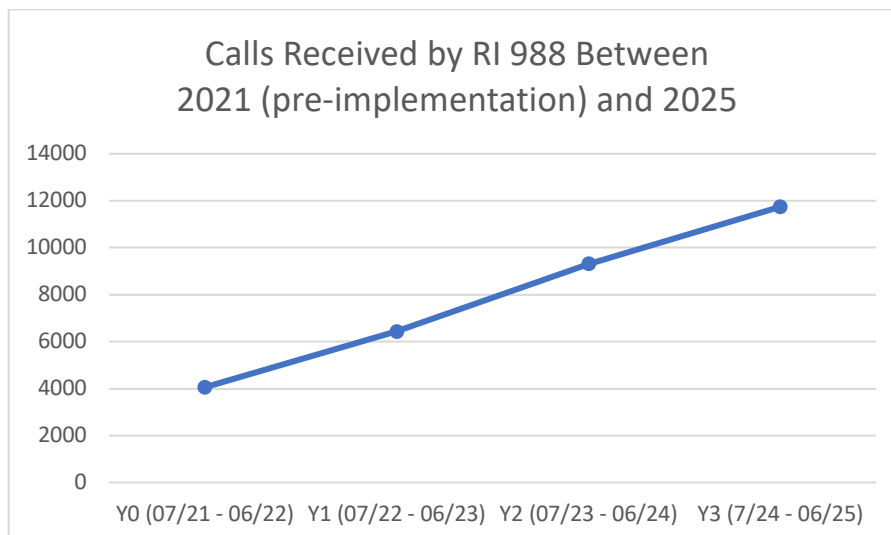
Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

I am writing to you to request that you please support Bill H8177, “988 CALL CENTER FUNDING AND OPERATIONS ACT,” which would authorize and fund 988 contact centers across Rhode Island, in accordance with the federal Congress requirements as set forth in the 2020 National Suicide Hotline Designation Act.

I write in support of this bill as a clinical psychologist, Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at Brown University, suicide prevention researcher and advocate, and RI resident. As you may be aware, our national rate of suicide has increased roughly 30% over the past 20 years, despite enormous efforts to develop, evaluate, and disseminate evidence-based interventions for suicide prevention. Although over 49,000 people die by suicide in the US annually, the rate of suicide attempt is over 30x this number, with approximately 1.5 million suicide attempts reported per year. The most updated statistics reveal that, in Rhode Island, we experience 1 suicide death every 3 days. This number translates to the 15th leading cause of death overall in our state, and for certain subgroups – particularly youth and young adults – suicide is currently the 2rd leading cause of death.

In July 2022, the federal government launched the 988 initiative - to increase accessibility and reach of the suicide and crisis lifeline at a national scale. Yet the initial infrastructure to establish 988 was just a start; the federal government has made clear that it is the states' responsibility to fund the services in a sustainable fashion.

This unfunded roll-out has been especially complicated given that the 988 number has achieved its aim of increased accessibility. In the year before 988 was rolled out in RI (Y0), 4059 calls to 988 were received in RI. In the years following, this number increased to 6427 (a 58% increase) in year 1, to 9313 (an additional 45% increase) in year 2, and to 11745 (and additional 26% increase) in year 3. **Altogether, this absolute increase in crisis calls received in RI over this time has been +189.4%.** To the credit of our crisis workers, RI also ranks amongst the highest in the US in “answer rate” of calls, with an average of **98% answered calls.**



The message is clear – **local 988 response is meeting the demand and RI is a model across the United States in timely and accessible suicide risk response.** NOW is the critical moment to act on H8177, in order to maintain this momentum and authorize the proposed infrastructure to fund our 988 contact centers in an ongoing and sustainable manner, in order to support the critical needs of Rhode Islanders in crisis.

If you are interested in how RI compares to our neighboring states, I urge you to consult this map:
<https://reimaginecrisis.org/map/>

Permanent, sustainable funding, is needed for our 988 system to meet these growing community crisis needs and to ensure access to a full continuum of crisis services for all Rhode Islanders, which includes mobile response teams and crisis stabilization centers in addition to our crisis call centers.

Thank you very much for your time and attention,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lauren Weinstock".

Lauren Weinstock, PhD