



May 14, 2026

Representative Marvin L. Abney, Chair

House Finance Committee

Rhode Island State House

Providence, RI 02903

RE: 8177

Dear Chairman Abney and Honorable Committee Members:

We are writing in strong support of H8177, an act that would establish a dedicated fund and the operations necessary for Rhode Island's 988 hotline for suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis management.

988 represents a critical shift in how we respond to mental health and substance use crises. It provides Rhode Islanders with immediate access to compassionate, trained crisis support through a free, confidential, and accessible resource available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. For many individuals experiencing emotional distress, suicidal ideation, or substance use-related crises, 988 serves as a vital point of connection before a situation escalates into a medical emergency, overdose, hospitalization, arrest, or incarceration. 988 diverts many individuals from having to call 911 and interact with law enforcement services unnecessarily.

From a recovery advocacy perspective, the value of 988 cannot be overstated. Recovery is built through community, connection, hope, and timely intervention. A person reaching out during a moment of crisis should be met with care, de-escalation, and pathways to treatment and recovery support — not unnecessary criminal justice involvement or barriers to accessing help.

988 significantly strengthens Rhode Island's ability to connect individuals to peer recovery support services. Peer recovery specialists bring lived experience and credibility that can help individuals feel understood, reduce stigma, and increase engagement with ongoing recovery and behavioral health services. These connections save lives and improve long-term outcomes.

H8177 is also a sound financial investment for our state. Far too often, untreated behavioral health and substance use crises result in repeated utilization of emergency departments, ambulance services, inpatient hospitalizations, law enforcement responses, and correctional systems. These responses are significantly more expensive and frequently fail to provide long-term stabilization or recovery support.

By investing in 988, Rhode Island can continue building a crisis response system that intervenes earlier and more effectively, reducing unnecessary strain on emergency rooms, first responders, and the carceral system, which are all already overburdened themselves, while improving access to appropriate community-based care.

166 Valley Street, Ste 105, Providence, RI 02909

office: (401) 475-2960 web: <https://ricares.org>



Rhode Island has already demonstrated highly effective implementation within the national 988 system, including not only call answer metrics that outperform national averages (Castro, 2025; SAMHSA, 2026), but a reduction in youth suicides by 11% (Patel et al., 2026). This success reflects the state's commitment to building a responsive behavioral health infrastructure. However, maintaining and expanding this level of service requires reliable and sustainable funding.

Creating a dedicated funding source through H8177 helps ensure that Rhode Islanders in crisis will continue to receive timely responses from local, trained professionals when they need help most. Because crisis response cannot function in instability.

Investing in 988 means investing in prevention, recovery, public health, and human dignity. It means recognizing that behavioral health crises deserve a healthcare response, and that early intervention benefits not only individuals and families, but the entire state.

We respectfully urge the committee to support H8177.

Thank you for your consideration.

Lindsay Garcia

Executive Director

Alex Gautieri

Assistant Director of Advocacy

Castro, A. (2025). *988 Day at the State House raises awareness of suicide prevention hotline*. The Valley Breeze. <https://rhodeislandcurrent.com/2025/09/08/988-day-at-r-i-state-house-raises-awareness-of-suicide-prevention-hotline/>

Patel, V., Liu, M., & Jena, A. (2026). *Suicide Mortality Among Adolescents and Young Adults After Launch of a Suicide and Crisis Lifeline*. Journal of American Medical Association. [https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2848066?guestAccessKey=e44e29be-7891-45b3-a22d-128a80e60dad&utm\\_source=for\\_the\\_media&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_campaign=ftm\\_links&utm\\_content=ftl&utm\\_term=042226](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2848066?guestAccessKey=e44e29be-7891-45b3-a22d-128a80e60dad&utm_source=for_the_media&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ftm_links&utm_content=ftl&utm_term=042226)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Data Dashboard (2026). <https://988lifeline.org/professionals/our-network/state-based-monthly-reports/>

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