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

May 14, 2026

Re: H8177 Testimony in Support of 988

Dear Rep. Marvin Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

I am writing to express my support for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. I work for the organization that manages the 988 Call Center, which gives me a unique perspective from observing the development of this federally mandated crisis hotline since inception. As Rhode Islanders come to know this number to call, text or chat, we see a shift toward clinically appropriate care, an alternative to the historically unproductive routing of people in these kinds of crises to hospital emergency departments, or even jails.

Rhode Island is ahead of the curve because our 988 Call Center is situated as an integral part of a coordinated system of care for crises related to behavioral health—including BH Link, Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS), Adult Mobile Crisis Teams and CCBHC (Certified Behavioral Health Clinics). A simple call provides immediate access to the right level of care that is appropriate. The diversion from 911 and law enforcement has ensured that people receive compassionate help in community settings with dignity and respect.

Evidence from emergency responders to emergency departments indicate that the 988 Call Center reduces reliance on law enforcement, lowers emergency room overuse and eliminates the potential for incarceration. 988 saves not only time and dollars, but saves peoples' lives.

Yet, every year advocates have needed to come to the RI General Assembly to make a plea for funding. At this pivotal moment, it is time to remove uncertainty for providers as we are at the place where we either strengthen this system, or risk losing all the good progress we have made. I'm asking that, this year, Rhode Island determines a way to establish permanent, dedicated funding for the operation of the 988 Call Center.

Respectfully submitted,

Colleen Joubert
Director of Communications & Development