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## Legislative Impact Statement

To: Chair Abney, House Finance Committee  
From: Emily Song, GCD Policy Fellow  
Re: 26 HOUSE 8177 AN ACT RELATING TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND HOSPITALS -- CORE STATE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS SERVICES SYSTEMS-988

Thursday, May 14, 2026

The Governor's Commission on Disabilities' Legislation Committee has developed a Legislative Impact Statement on the bill listed below. The Commission would be pleased to present testimony to the committee. Please contact me (462-0110) if testimony is desired or for additional information.

By Representative Shallcross Smith

Establishes the 988 call center fund to support staffing, installation of new infrastructure, and provide required training related to maintaining the 988 call center. It is designed to be jointly operated across Rhode Island executive departments and primarily by a nonprofit entity. The bill also requires annual reports detailing revenue, expenditures, and service performances.

### Legislation Committee finds this bill Beneficial

Before the launch of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, the U.S. suffered from an estimated 500,399 lives lost from suicide.<sup>1</sup> About 9 in 10 adults agree that the U.S. is in a mental health crisis, and total suicide rates reached their peak in 2022.<sup>1</sup> According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 1 in 5 Rhode Island residents has a mental illness, and 1 in 20 has thoughts of suicide, resulting in 126 lives lost in 2022.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, more than 390,000 people are unable to receive professional mental health assistance, exacerbating the state's mental health crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Since its introduction in 2022, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline has been promising. The center has been receiving over 10 million calls, and constantly observes drastic increases annually.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, studies demonstrate a significant reduction in suicidal thoughts among 59%

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/988-suicide-crisis-lifeline-two-years-after-launch/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nami.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/RhodeIsland-GRPA-Data-Sheet-8.5-x-11-wide.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Id.

of the callers and 72% citing that the service was very helpful.<sup>4</sup> Even with the surge of calls and texts, national answer rates and wait times have improved, which is largely attributed to local state efforts to increase funding, especially due to the lack of sufficient federal funding.<sup>5</sup> Rhode Island currently ranks sixth in terms of increase in call volumes, yet still fails to implement state measures to support the high demand.<sup>6</sup>

Given the wide range of benefits of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, the state should provide a consistent source of funding and expertise to support Rhode Island residents. Establishing the 988 call center fund and investing in staff and infrastructure are crucial to ensuring the psychological and physical well-being of our residents. Access to these services without barriers significantly benefits the health of all patients and should be fully guaranteed for our community.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2025.08.8.12>

<sup>5</sup> See ft. 2

<sup>6</sup> See ft. 2