

**To:** House Committee on Finance

**From:** Marianne Gibson, Vice President, Youth, Crisis and Workforce Policy

**Date:** May 14, 2026

**Re:** Support for H 8177 - 988 Call Center and BH Link Operations Act

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Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Inseparable, a national mental health policy and advocacy organization focused on crisis system transformation and access to care, we thank you for the opportunity to express our support for H 8177- the 988 Call Center and BH Link Operations Act. This bill establishes a clear operational and governance framework for Rhode Island's 988 call center and BH Link crisis response system.

## **Rhode Island's Need for a Strong, Coordinated Crisis System**

Rhode Island has made important progress in building out its behavioral health crisis continuum, including the through the launch of BH Link and implementation of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. However, demand for crisis services continues to grow, and long-term sustainability remains a key challenge. Without a clearly defined operational structure and dedicated funding approach, crisis systems can face fragmentation, staffing instability, and inconsistent service delivery.

A well-functioning crisis system depends on more than just a hotline, it requires a coordinated infrastructure that ensures individuals can move seamlessly from initial contact to appropriate, in-person stabilization and follow-up care. Gaps in governance, funding reliability, or system coordination can undermine that continuum and limit the effectiveness of otherwise strong services.

## **What H 8177 Would Do**

H 8177 establishes a clear structure for Rhode Island's crisis system by:

- Authorizing the director to designate and fully fund the 988 call center, BH Link, and related crisis stabilization services
- Requiring that the 988 call center be operated by an independent, nonprofit entity focused exclusively on responding to crisis contacts
- Defining allowable uses of funding, including staffing, technology, training, and public awareness
- Prohibiting funds from being used to expand beyond federally authorized services or to support state agency operations

- Requiring coordination between the call center and BH Link to support crisis outreach and stabilization
- Establishing reporting and audit requirements to increase transparency and accountability

Together, these provisions create a more defined, accountable, and is an important step towards a sustainable crisis response system.

### **Why This Matters**

By clarifying governance and allowable uses of funding, this legislation helps stabilize and strengthen Rhode Island's existing crisis infrastructure. Ensuring that the 988 call center operates independently and in coordination with BH Link supports a more reliable and responsive crisis system for individuals in need.

The bill also reinforces a coordinated continuum of care; connecting individuals from initial contact through stabilization and referral, which is critical to reducing unnecessary emergency department use and improving outcomes.

While H 8177 does not establish a dedicated funding stream, it creates a strong structural foundation for the crisis system. Over time, Rhode Island may benefit from identifying a sustainable, dedicated funding mechanism to fully support these services and ensure long-term system stability.

### **Bottom Line**

H 8177 provides a critical framework to strengthen Rhode Island's crisis response system and improve coordination across 988 and BH Link. **Inseparable respectfully urges the committee to support H 8177.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Mariane Gibson

Vice President, Youth, Crisis and Workforce Policy