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The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chairman, House Finance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Opposition to HB 8177 – Relating to Public Utilities and Carriers – 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Chair Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Verizon's comments on House Bill 8177. Verizon remains a dedicated partner in Rhode Island's efforts to expand mental health resources. To that end, our teams have already finalized the technical network updates required to ensure that any resident dialing 988 is instantly connected to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

While we fully support the mission of the 988 lifeline, we must respectfully **OPPOSE** the creation of a new \$0.50 monthly telecommunications tax due to the disproportionate financial burden this proposal places on Rhode Island customers..

Rhode Island households, already navigating an inflationary environment, are highly sensitive to new monthly costs. A \$0.50 per-line fee, while seemingly minor, compounds an already complex and heavy tax structure applied to essential wireless services.

As a member of CTIA, we offer their example highlighting the state taxes and fees charged to a typical Rhode Island family of four on a four-line wireless plan:

- \$2.00 monthly 911 fee (\$0.50 per line)
- \$3.00 monthly First Responder tax (\$0.75 per line)
- The 7% State Sales Tax
- The 5% Gross Receipts Surcharge

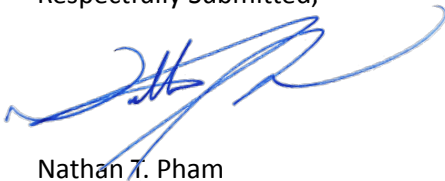
Cumulatively, these mandatory charges already exceed \$200 annually, equating to an effective tax rate of roughly 17%. This is more than double the standard 7% sales tax on most consumer goods. Adding an additional **\$2.00 per month (\$24 per year)** through HB 8177 would result in financially penalizing families, particularly low- and moderate-income households, for maintaining their wireless services for work, education, and safety.

The proposed \$0.50 fee is a significant outlier. If enacted, this would become the second highest 988 tax in the United States, substantially exceeding the national average rate of only \$0.29 among states that have imposed such a fee. It is also worth noting that 40 other states have found ways to support 988 services through federal grants and existing state resources without targeting the phone bills of their residents.

Verizon fully supports the 988 program and its vital role in public safety. However, this proposal is financially burdensome on Rhode Island residents who are already navigating a difficult fiscal landscape. We urge the Committee to reject this targeted tax and that HB 8177 be held in committee for further study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'N. Pham', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Nathan T. Pham

Verizon, State Government Affairs