

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND



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May 14, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair
House Committee on Finance
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: 2026— H 8177 — An Act Relating to Public Utilities and Carriers – 988 Call Center Funding and Operations Act

Dear Chair Abney:

Please accept this letter of opposition regarding H 8177, which would alter the infrastructure and funding requirements of the 988 hotline for suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis management beyond what is articulated in Article 10 of Governor McKee's FY 2027 proposed budget.

BHDDH launched BH Link, a 24/7 triage facility serving individuals in crisis due to mental health, substance use conditions and co-occurring disorders in 2018; it has been serving as a crisis outreach and stabilization service center in response to 988 calls since 2022. The provider involved in these services was selected through the state's competitive bid process. This process ensures that the provider has the qualifications necessary to effectively administer a service that has time and again demonstrated its value in moments of crisis.

H 8177 establishes a new system by which the General Assembly designates the provider while BHDDH handles contract awarding, creating the risk of an accountability gap. This bill proposes a service that is not operated or overseen by any single agency. This would strip BHDDH of essential oversight responsibilities, including licensure, quality management, and compliance with federal SAMHSA standards.

988 has been capably overseen by BHDDH since its inception four years ago, resulting in a 98% in-state answer rate, ranking among the top states in the nation. BHDDH has demonstrated expertise in provider evaluation, licensure, and performance monitoring. As such, we are best positioned to select and oversee contractors to maintain the most effective service for Rhode Islanders.

For these reasons, I urge this Committee to preserve unified state oversight for effective crisis response as articulated in Article 10 of Governor McKee's FY 2027 proposed budget. We look forward to collaborating with the Honorable Members of this Committee on strengthening 988 services while ensuring effective delegation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David W. Pelletier".

Richard Leclerc
Director

cc: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance
The Honorable Mary Ann Shallcross Smith
Danica Iacoi, Esquire, Chief of Staff to the Speaker of the House
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy