

April 14, 2026

Senator Louis P. DiPalma
Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

RE: Personal Testimony in Support of S3058 and Article 10, Sections 1 and 2 of the FY 2027 Budget

Dear Chairman, DiPalma and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Melissa Ames. I am a resident, a volunteer with the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. I am writing to you today not just as an advocate, but someone who is still carrying weight that never truly goes away to loss of someone from suicide.

On June 1, 2015, my life changed forever. It started as a perfectly normal morning of school drop-offs and work emails. Then, at 10:00 AM, a single question shattered everything: *"Did you hear about Johnnie?"*

Johnnie had been my friend for 24 years. Just two weeks earlier, he was at my 40th birthday party, laughing and celebrating. We had talked only three days before he died. When the news was confirmed, time simply ceased to exist for me. While the rest of the world kept moving, I was trapped in a "slow-motion" grief that I still navigate today, eleven years later.

Johnnie struggled with a depression that made him feel utterly alone, even though he was surrounded by people who loved him.

The crisis in our state has only intensified since I lost my friend. In late 2025, we saw a staggering 212% increase in calls to 988 Lifeline. In July 2025 alone, our local call center handled 1,530 calls—nearly triple the volume from its launch month. These aren't just statistics on a spreadsheet; they are "Johnnies." They are Rhode Islanders aged 10 to 64 who are reaching out because they are at the brink.

By fully funding Article 10, Sections 1 and 2 of the 2027 budget, you are doing so much more. You are providing an outlet for the person who feels they have no one left to talk to. You are choosing early intervention over the trauma of an emergency room visit or a police response.

I am asking you to help us ensure that no other Rhode Islander must experience the "10:00 AM phone call" that changed my life. Please support the funding for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Let's choose hope for the Ocean State.



With gratitude and hope,

Melissa Ames
Volunteer Advocate and Policy Chair, AFSP Rhode Island