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Senator Melissa Murray, Chairman Health & Human Services Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street Providence, RI 02903

March 24, 2026

Re: S3058 Testimony in Support of 988 Call Center and BH Link Operations Act

Dear Senator Murray and Members of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee:

I am writing to express **my support for the 988 Call Center and BH Link Operations Act**. The bill safeguards access to the full behavioral health crisis safety net, reassuring Rhode Islanders that we treat mental health emergencies within a system that is as competent and responsive as our medical emergency system of care.

The bill builds on the momentum already in place—BH Link, 988 and CCBHC Mobile Crisis Teams. These three options provide immediate help for a mental health or behavioral health emergency for all Rhode Islanders. I work for organization that provides staffing and management of the 988 Call Center and BH Link, which gives me a unique perspective from observing the development this federally mandated crisis hotline since inception and the integration of BH Link into the continuum of treatment. The 988 Call Center and BH Link are a direct access point for MRSS and CCBHC services when needed. We see a reduction in behavioral health visits to hospital emergency rooms when 988 is used instead of 911.

The implementation of 988 required coordinated effort and countless hours by numerous factions. The State also invested in far-reaching marketing campaigns. Now, the number of crisis calls increases year after year as more people are aware of the 988 option to ask for help. The need is underscored by the fact that we receive thousands of calls each month. For example, in one month (November, 2025), 988 answered 1737 calls! In 2025, over 2000 callers were referred to BH Link by calling 988. Rhode Island can boast having among the fastest answer rates in the country at 1.6 seconds with 99% of calls staying within the State. Local help of this kind proves to be the most effective for people in crisis.

Having the 988 number to call gives every Rhode Islander a place to start when experiencing a crisis of any sort or level (no crisis is too small); and all the evidence from emergency responders to emergency departments indicate that these programs save not only time and dollars, but save peoples' lives. Yet, every year advocates have needed to come to the RI General Assembly to make a plea to ensure the continuation of 988 and adequate funding for behavioral health services, including BH Link. It is time to remove the uncertainty and put this issue to rest. I'm asking that, this year, Rhode Island ensures that 988 and BH Link are established as permanent programs in the continuum of care for behavioral health.

The following story highlighted in our Annual Report illustrates how Call Center staff are a lifeline for people in tenuous situations and that it might take more than one call—but when there is someone to talk to, there is hope.

(Continued)



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ONE PERSON'S STORY

One suicidal person would call regularly—screaming, yelling, crying. This person had experienced trauma and frequent job loss and was expressing signs of depression, and anxiety. He was hesitant to seek resources at first because he didn't have health insurance but kept calling for a few months. Over time, he came to trust, take advice and receive help. Now, he calls to update the Call Center staff. He lets us know that he is in therapy, has a steady job, and is reaching his goals. He worked very hard for that. He's 10 months sober now.

—As told by a 988 Call Center Case Worker

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Colleen Joubert".

Colleen Joubert
Director of Communications & Development