

Subject: Support S3058 for the 988 Call Center and BH Link Operations Act

To: Chair Murray and Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee,

From: Melissa Ames, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention RI Chapter, Advocacy Chair

Date: March 24, 2026

I am writing to express my strong support for the **988 Call Center and BH Link Operations Act**. This legislation is a vital step toward ensuring that every Rhode Islander facing a behavioral health crisis has access to immediate, professional, and reliable support.

Since the national launch of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, we have seen how critical it is to have a localized response system. This bill provides the necessary framework to stabilize and sustain our state's crisis infrastructure in several keyways:

- **Sustainable Funding:** By authorizing a dedicated funding stream for the 988-call center and BH Link, this bill ensures that these life-saving services are not left to the whims of fluctuating budgets. It prioritizes staffing, technology, and training—the backbone of any effective crisis response.
- **Operational Independence:** The requirement that the 988-call center be operated by a non-governmental nonprofit entity is essential. It ensures the center remains focused exclusively on its core mission—answering the call for help—while maintaining the flexibility to meet federal SAMHSA standards without the bureaucratic constraints of a state agency.
- **Integration with BH Link:** Rhode Island is a leader in crisis intervention thanks to BH Link. Formally codifying the relationship between the 988 hotline and BH Link's 24/7 triage and stabilization services creates a "no wrong door" policy for those in need.
- **Accountability and Transparency:** The provisions for annual reporting on performance metrics and mandatory audits by the Auditor General provide the public and the General Assembly with the assurance that funds are being used efficiently and effectively to save lives.

A mental health crisis should be treated with the same urgency as a physical medical emergency. This bill ensures that when a neighbor, friend, or family member reaches out in their darkest moment, Rhode Island is ready to answer.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass the 988 Call Center and BH Link Operations Act to protect the health and safety of all Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

Melissa Ames

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention RI Chapter

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