



March 24, 2026

The Honorable Senator Melissa A. Murray  
Chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: Support / Amend - Senate Bill 3058 - BH Link and 988 Suicide Prevention and Crisis Line**

**Dear Chairwoman Murray and Members of the Committee:**

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island's (MHARI) strong support for Senate Bill 3058. We are grateful to Chairwoman Melissa Murray for introducing this legislation, which in our view, is the **most important bill** under consideration this year.

MHARI is a private nonprofit consumer advocacy organization dedicated to advancing the rights and well-being of people living with mental health conditions. I am also submitting this testimony as someone with lived experience. In 2016, I attempted suicide. I am here today because support was available when I needed it. Helplines like 988 save lives. They offer a moment of connection, compassion, and hope when someone may feel they have none.

We strongly support this legislation, which establishes the operational framework for Rhode Island's 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and BH Link. This bill recognizes that access to crisis response services is essential to public health and safety and helps ensure that Rhode Islanders in crisis have somewhere to turn.

However, we respectfully urge the Committee to adopt two key amendments to ensure the long-term success and accountability of this system.

**First, we believe that the legislation should include a sustainable funding source.**

Maintaining 988 call centers is an unfunded federal mandate. While the bill acknowledges the need for reliable funding, it does not establish one. A modest, predictable funding stream would ensure that calls are answered promptly, staff are adequately trained, and services remain available when people need them most. Without dedicated, ongoing funding, we risk building a system that cannot meet demand or maintain quality over time.

Other states have addressed this challenge by implementing small monthly surcharges on phone bills—typically between \$0.25 and \$0.75—to sustainably fund their 988 systems. Telecommunications companies in other states have opposed this measure, citing the concern that their customers will



blame them for rate hikes. This is a legitimate and solvable concern. We respectfully encourage telecommunications companies to partner with community organizations and the state to advance a statewide public outreach campaign, helping Rhode Islanders understand that a modest annual contribution—just \$6.00—can save lives.

It's also important to identify a permanent funding stream so that other sources of funding – such as **SAMHSA block grants** – are not taken away from local organizations and diverted to 988 operations. SAMHSA block grants sustain a number of small nonprofit organizations – including MHARI.

**Second, we respectfully encourage the Committee to allow the Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals to select the appropriate nonprofit operator.** This would ensure coordination across the behavioral health system and align 988 services with statewide priorities—while still allowing the call center to operate effectively. We value accountability and transparency in the operation of these critical services, and we believe that the reporting requirements set forth in this legislation will ensure both.

At its core, this legislation is about saving lives. But to do that, we must ensure the system is not only established—but also sustained, accountable, and responsive. When someone reaches out to 988, they are making a courageous decision to seek help. We have a responsibility to be there on the other end of that call—every time.

For these reasons, MHARI respectfully urges the Committee to pass **Senate Bill 3058 with the recommended amendments.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Laurie-Marie Pisciotta'.

Laurie-Marie Pisciotta  
Executive Director  
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