



## Washington County Coalition for Children

To: Senator Melissa Murray, Chair, and Members of the Senate HHS Committee

Date: March 24, 2026

RE: **Support for S3058 - 988 CALL CENTER AND BH LINK OPERATIONS ACT**

I write on behalf of the Washington County Coalition in support of S3058, which codifies two essential components of our state's behavioral health crisis response system: the 988 Crisis Lifeline and BH Link.

The federal National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 not only established 9-8-8 as the national suicide prevention hotline, but outlined the vision for the implementation of a comprehensive behavioral health crisis system across the United States for people of all ages. This vision includes 3 components, two of which RI has well established and which this bill seeks to codify:



**Someone to Call**

(24/7 Hotline via call, text, chat)

**Someone**



**to Respond**

(Mobile Crisis Services)



**A Safe Place to Be**

(BH Link)

Why is this important? **Behavioral**

**health crises require behavioral health responses.**

Not police responses to 911 calls or trips to local Emergency Depts. ill-equipped to deal with psychiatric emergencies. As this bill outlines, RI's behavioral health crisis response system includes trained hotline counselors to provide crisis intervention counseling and triage calls (988) and clinicians who can provide crisis assessments and stabilize patients in a safe environment (BH Link).

Emergency Depts. with their fast pace and focus on critically ill patients are not the place for children in emotional distress to obtain behavioral health care. The mere presence of police and fire/ambulance response can also be anxiety producing for children in crisis. Yet, these have become the 'de facto' responses. We are in the midst of a youth mental health emergency. More young people are struggling with anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts than ever before. In these moments of pain, access to immediate help matters. The 988 Lifeline provides that help — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, connecting Rhode Islanders in crisis to trained professionals who can listen, deescalate, and guide them to care. While BH Link is designed for Adults, 988 counselors connect youth in need of on-site intervention with Mobile Response & Stabilization Services (MRSS) which can be deployed to where ever children and families are (home, school, playground, etc.) and stabilize youth in their homes and communities.

While RI has more work to do in building and financially sustaining the behavioral health crisis system envisioned by the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020, this bill lays a strong foundation and warrants passage. We urge you to **pass S3058** so one day soon every Rhode Islander in crisis will be guaranteed someone to call, someone to respond, and a path toward safety and healing.

Sincerely,

Robert Hicks

Volunteer Lobbyist

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