



## RE: Support H7035 for 988 in Rhode Island

Kerrie Constant, Area Director  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Rhode Island Chapter  
508-493-0180 [kconstant@afsp.org](mailto:kconstant@afsp.org)  
May 15, 2024

Chairman and House Finance Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony in support of H7035, which would provide sustainable funding for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and Crisis Behavioral Health Services.

My name is Kerrie Constant; I am a Warwick, RI, resident and a mom of two adult children who struggle with mental health.

I am also the Area Director for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Rhode Island Chapter. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is a voluntary health organization that gives those affected by suicide a community empowered by research, education, hope for healing, and advocacy against suicide. I provide staff support to amazing Rhode Island volunteers and collaborate with other mental health organizations to address suicide as a public health issue, suicide prevention, and support for suicide loss survivors.

Mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, and substance use problems, especially when unaddressed, increase the risk for suicide — most people who actively manage their mental health conditions go on to engage in life. If we encourage more people to seek treatment, we will make a huge difference in improving mental health and reducing suicide. Providing continued funding for the 988-crisis services system allows the Rhode Island community to reach out and seek help when in crisis and, in turn, could save lives.

In my experience, I wish I had access to 988 five years ago. It was a few weeks before my son's 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday that I recognized he was showing signs of severe depression. At first, I didn't talk to him about it; I thought maybe he was just stressed over college finals. It so happened that I took a mental health first aid class, which made me realize my son was in crisis. I went home and asked him if he thought about taking his life, and without skipping a beat, he said yes. He was not planning on living past his 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday. At that moment, I did not know what to do, how to help him, or who to call. Luckily, we kept him safe and eventually got him to help, but it took a few days. And for those few days, I couldn't sleep. All I could think about was how I could keep my son alive. If we had access to 988 crisis services, we could have accessed help much sooner.

With Suicide being the 2nd leading cause of death for youth 10 to 24, I am grateful daily that my son was not part of those statistics. Even though my son is safe now and seeks treatment, he still struggles sometimes. Knowing he has access to 988 is critical to his safety plan. I share my personal experience with you today because I am sure other families in Rhode Island have witnessed their loved ones in a mental health crisis and did not know where to turn for help. By supporting bill H7035, we can diversify and maintain funding to meet the growing need for 988 crisis services that provide care and hope to those experiencing a mental crisis or someone supporting someone through a mental health crisis.

Evaluations and feedback show that crisis counselors effectively reduce distress and suicidality and help tens of thousands of people get through crises daily. I can tell you that it would have been helpful for my son, family, and me to have a crisis counselor support us in getting help immediately.

Committee members, the AFSP Rhode Island Chapter, and I are thankful for your consideration of H7035. We are grateful to be able to work together to address mental health and suicide prevention in Rhode Island. By ensuring the 988 continuum of crisis services sustainable funding is a priority, we will increase awareness, decrease the stigma around mental health, and save lives.

With Gratitude and HOPE,

*Kerrie Constant*