



February 19, 2023

Dear Members of the Human Services Policy Committee:

NAMI Minnesota strongly supports HF 1566 which would fund 988 in Minnesota. The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act, federal legislation designating 988 as the three-digit dialing code for suicide prevention, was signed into law in October 2020. This was the result of years of work by the mental health community to create an easy to remember telephone number that could help people experiencing a mental health crisis and their families. The number went live on July 16, 2022.

Prior to passage of 988 on the federal level Minnesotans experiencing a mental health crisis and their families had three options: 1) contact one of the 87 county mental health crisis teams directly; 2) dial **CRISIS from a cell phone (which didn't always work depending on your phone carrier); 3) call 911 and hope that under Travis' law a mental health crisis team was dispatched; 4) call 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Mental health advocates in Minnesota wanted an easy to remember phone number that would increase the probability of a mental health response instead of a police response to a mental health crisis.

Now that 988 is in place, we have seen a huge increase in its usage. As we predicted, having an easy number to remember increased calls to 988. Since switching to 988 on July 16, calls to Minnesota's four call centers have increased 44%. Minnesota has also seen a 173% increase in web chats (since January 2022) and 250% increase in texts to 988. Crises are typically de-escalated on the call, with less than 2% of Lifeline calls engaging emergency services or mobile crisis response.

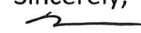
Short-term federal funding has helped our 988 lifeline centers in Minnesota build capacity to meet the increased need and answer a much higher number of calls in-state. However, this is not ongoing funding, and we urgently need to create a stable and sustainable funding model to support the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in Minnesota long-term. In addition, our call centers are answering very few texts or chats.

It is critical that calls to 988 from Minnesotans be answered in our own state so that connections to local resources and mobile crisis response can be made. Calls answered in other states simply won't know the resources, including our crisis teams.

HF1566 creates a funding model similar to 911 with a small telecom fee for landline and cell phones. The proposed fee would be between 12 cents and 25 cents per month. It also draws an investment from the current budget surplus to allow our Lifeline centers to continue to build capacity in 2023 and 2024 as telecom fees are established and collected.

We hear all too often from legislators and others that we need to prevent suicides and we need divert people with mental illnesses from the criminal justice. The best and most effective way to do that is to build our mental health system, and that includes ensuring access to timely and comprehensive responses to calls to 988. We urge you to support HF 1566.

Sincerely,


Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director



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