



April 5, 2023

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair, Senate Subcommittee on Labor,
HHS, Education Appropriations
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member, Senate Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair, House Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,
Education Appropriations
266 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: FY2024 LHHS Subcommittee Appropriations Requests for 988 and Crisis Response

Dear Chairs Baldwin and Aderholt and Ranking Members Capito and DeLauro:

The undersigned organizations represent a growing group of multi-sector national leaders that have come together to reimagine how communities respond to people experiencing mental health, substance use, and suicidal crises. Together, we represent people with mental health conditions and substance use disorders and their families, individuals affected by suicide, health care and emergency response professionals, advocates for civil and disability rights, law enforcement and others. We are deeply grateful for the historic, bipartisan investments and collaboration that are transforming how we respond to people in a mental health, substance use and suicidal crisis. We write to share our strong support for the below funding priorities, which fall under the jurisdictions of the House and Senate Labor, Health, Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittees.

In 2020, Congress took an important step in reimagining crisis response by passing bipartisan legislation, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-172), to designate 988 as the new nationwide, three-digit number for mental health, substance use and suicidal crises. This number became available nationwide in July of 2022 and connects people to trained crisis counselors that can provide de-escalation and mental health intervention services by phone, text and chat – ideally coordinating connections to additional mental health and substance use resources in their community. In the first six months, more than 2.1 million contacts were made to the 988 network.

While this is a great step forward to assist people in more easily accessing the help they need, it's only the first step. Right now, the full system needed to appropriately respond to people in

crisis who call, text or chat 988 is not available in most communities. Few communities have the full range of mental health crisis services needed to help every person in crisis – and often at insufficient levels to meet current or future demand. To fulfill the promise of 988, we must ensure the full crisis care continuum is available to individuals across the United States. This continuum starts with fully staffed, culturally competent 24/7 call centers, mobile crisis teams to provide an in-person response when needed, and crisis stabilization options.

Your Subcommittees' support will help us ensure that 988 can live up to its full potential of ensuring that every person in a mental health crisis gets a mental health response. In particular, we urge the Committee to fund the following:

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: \$836 million in FY24

We urge your Subcommittees to include \$836 million for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline program to effectively reach and serve all persons in a mental health, substance use or suicide crisis through a national network of crisis call centers. In the first six months of activity (July – December 2022), more than 2.1 million contacts were made to the 988 Lifeline, a 36.8 percent increase over the same period in 2021. The Lifeline is on track to hit more than 6 million contacts in FY23.

SAMHSA estimates 9 million contacts will be made to 988 in FY24, an increase of 50 percent over 2023. We urge Congress to adequately respond to this surge by supporting state efforts to build Lifeline call center capacity to meet this growing demand. Given the growing visibility and awareness around 988, we must ensure that every person calling, texting or chatting is met with quick, effective crisis support when they need it most. This funding would support the estimated \$756.9 million needed to answer 9 million contacts in 2024 and support increased public awareness efforts to reach at-risk communities.

Within this request, the Reimagine Crisis Response partners request that \$20 million be directed to the provision of text and chat services in Spanish, ensuring Spanish-language services are available for all modalities (currently, only callers can receive Spanish language crisis counselors). Additionally, we request \$35.1 million be directed to the provision of LGBTQI+ specialized services for youth and young adults within the Lifeline program. Currently, these specialized services are being provided via a six-month pilot program, and early demand shows a dire need for long-term investment in this resource.

Behavioral Health Crisis & 988 Coordinating Office: \$10 million in FY24

We urge you to include \$10 million in FY24 for the Behavioral Health Crisis & 988 Coordinating Office at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This office maintains the critical work of coordinating efforts across federal agencies and between federal and state entities to ensure the effectiveness of this crisis system. These resources will enable SAMHSA to coordinate a crisis care system encompassing nationwide standards and data analysis under the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use. This coordination will expand the capacity of and access to crisis call centers, mobile crisis care and emergency psychiatric services.

Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (MHBG): 10% crisis set aside in FY24

The MHBG provides important resources to states to provide mental health resources to people with serious mental illness. For the last several years, states were required to use 5 percent of their block grant funding for crisis services (a set-aside). We urge Congress to double this set-aside to 10 percent (equivalent to \$165 million with a funding level of \$1.653 billion for the block grant) for crisis services to support state implementation of a comprehensive crisis system.

Mental Health Crisis Response Grants: \$100 million

While the vast majority of contacts to 988 can be deescalated over the phone, an estimated 10 to 20 percent of contacts may need more support than can be provided via call, text or chat. We urge Congress to increase the Mental Health Crisis Response Grant program to \$100 million (\$80 million above FY23) to help communities create mobile crisis response teams that divert people in mental health crises from justice system involvement. Mobile crisis teams are critical to provide an in-person response.

We are grateful for the bipartisan commitment to ensuring every person in a mental health, substance use or suicidal crisis gets the help and support they need. We look forward to working with your Subcommittees as you finalize FY24 appropriations. If we can provide any assistance or information, please reach out to Michael Linskey, NAMI's Director of Congressional Affairs, at mlinskey@nami.org.

Regards,

American Counseling Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Behavioral Health Foundation
Behavioral Health Link
Centerstone
Connections Health Solutions
Crisis Residential Association
Crisis Text Line
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Fountain House
Inseparable
Legal Action Center
Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association

National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Parent Teacher Association
Police, Treatment, and Community Collaborative
RI International
Solari Crisis & Human Services
The Jed Foundation
The Kennedy Forum
The Trevor Project
Treatment Advocacy Center

Cc: The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair, House Appropriations
Committee

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations
Committee