

Support Continued Funding for 988 Hotline and Implementation

Statement: The implementation of 988, a three-digit mental health and suicide crisis line, on July 16, 2022 requires mental health crisis services to be funded sufficiently and reliably in order to support crisis call centers and other services on the crisis continuum of care.

The problem: Suicide is on the rise. According to data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Kansas suicides have increased by 46% percent from 1999-2017. The highest rates of suicide deaths are found in our rural and frontier Kansas counties. Youth continue to be highly vulnerable, with suicide deaths in 10–17-year-olds increased by 70% between 2015 and 2018.

Why this matters: Utilization of crisis call centers has been on the rise across the state of Kansas for the last five years. Calls from Kansans to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline have risen 65% in this time. Johnson County Mental Health Center also reports a 64% increase in calls to their county crisis line from 2016-2021. The trend is clear; **more and more Kansans are turning to crisis call centers when they need help de-escalating a crisis or getting connected to longer term support.** 988 will create an easier to remember, and therefore more accessible, service which is expected to result in 2-5 times as many calls from Kansans. In order to meet the needs of Kansans in crisis and ensure that help is available any time there is a need, the legislature must identify a funding stream for crisis call centers which is reliable and predictable. HB 2281 is a solution to the current funding gap. This legislation will establish a suicide prevention fund to be funded by a fee on phone lines of \$0.50 per line. It is anticipated this will produce \$17 million in revenue in its first year of approval. The funds generated will be a protected source of funding for crisis call centers and crisis response services outlined as allowable expenses in the federal *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act* (S.2661).

988 crisis call center services are cost-efficient and effective. Researchers have found that National Suicide Prevention Lifeline services effectively de-escalate callers who are identified as high risk, thus reducing the need for emergency department visits, police and emergency responder calls and other high-cost, restrictive mental health services. Crisis call centers help in the moment, and also offer follow-up contacts which have been shown to stop callers from killing themselves and kept them safe (Gould et al., 2017).

The bottom line: 988 services can save lives by connecting people in crisis, and their loved ones, to a mental health professional at the right time. Ensuring adequate and reliable funding for crisis call centers and a continuum of crisis services can ensure that the promise of 988 is fulfilled for each Kansan no matter where in the state they reside.

Telling More of the Story

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) network is comprised of over 165 local crisis call centers. Kansas is served by three of these centers: COMCARE of Sedgwick County,

988 Crisis System

National Suicide Hotline Designation Act (S.2661)

High-tech crisis call center hubs.

Mobile crisis response teams

Crisis receiving facilities

Crisis residential services

Follow-up contacts for crisis hotline callers

Johnson County Mental Health Center, and Kansas Suicide Prevention HQ. The 988 Coalition convened by the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services has worked diligently since May 2021 to assess the needs and capacity of Kansas to meet the anticipated demands of the NSPL transitioning to 988. The legislature's inclusion of \$3 million in the state FY 2022 budget has enabled the state's NSPL crisis call centers to begin preparations for the 988 transition. Crisis call centers are hiring additional call taking staff, increasing availability of online chat and text messaging services, and building the technological infrastructure which will be needed in July 2022. Given the trend of yearly increases in crisis call volume and the expected growth with the transition to 988 it is critical the crisis call workforces is maintained and grown.

The first point of access for many people with suicidal thoughts is the NSPL or another crisis call line. Many times people in crisis, or their loved ones, find it difficult to navigate the complex system of mental health resources in our state. When the NSPL is contacted, the caller is directed to a nationally accredited center in their state. This allows the caller to speak to a counselor who is familiar with local resources and is equipped to offer in the moment de-escalation, suicide screening, safety planning and connections to local mental health resources. If the local center is busy, calls are directed out of state, which lengthens wait times for people in crisis. Kansas's local crisis call centers, when adequately funded, are able to act as centralized hubs which connect people in crisis to the help they desperately need.

The *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act* (S. 2661), in addition to identifying 988 as a new three digit crisis number, provides an avenue for increasing the capacity of our community crisis response systems. The legislation allows the addition of a state-managed monthly customer fee on phone lines. This mechanism in Kansas is modeled after the 911 fee which has proven to be a reliable funding source for these services. The fee will also fund crisis system components which allow for robust responses to contacts which are not resolved immediately.

In summary, the Kansas legislature must identify a funding source for NSPL crisis call centers, so that callers can be connected to trained, mental health crisis counselors who are able to connect them to in-person crisis response services as needed and other lifesaving follow-up care.

