



Testimony for LD 1216

May 15, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Michelle Hansen, and I serve as the Senior Director of Crisis Services at The Opportunity Alliance. We operate the Maine Crisis Line under contract with the State's Office of Behavioral Health. As Maine's centralized crisis and suicide hotline—and the state's sole 988 contact center—we provide services under a national network agreement with Vibrant Emotional Health, in alignment with expectations set by SAMHSA and coordinated closely with the Office of Behavioral Health.

I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony on the sponsor amendment to LD 1216, which introduces key statutory definitions and addresses the relationship between 988 and 911 emergency dispatch services.

I'd like to clarify that Maine already has a well-established process for transferring calls between 911 and 988 when clinically appropriate. This amendment does not create that process – it codifies it. That's an important distinction, as it affirms the collaborative work already being done to ensure individuals in crisis are connected with the most appropriate response.

The Maine Crisis Line answers more than 150,000 calls annually, in addition to providing support through chat and text services. Our team of highly trained crisis professionals adheres to rigorous national standards to deliver timely, compassionate, and clinically appropriate care. We respond to a wide range of self-defined crises – situations where a person's emotional distress exceeds their ability to cope. These may involve suicidal thoughts, substance use, non-suicidal self-injury, intent to harm others, anxiety, depression, grief, lack of resources, or other urgent mental health concerns.

Codifying 988 as an essential service is an important step in strengthening Maine's behavioral health crisis system. While 988 is a clinical service at its core, it also supports public safety by helping people in crisis get the right help – often without involving law enforcement or emergency services. In fact, fewer than 1% of calls to the Maine Crisis Line result in a nonconsensual emergency response. This low rate helps build trust, which is essential for encouraging people to reach out.

That's why it's important to keep a clear distinction between 988 and traditional public safety services. At the same time, strong coordination with 911 ensures people get the right response when needed. This balance – between clinical care and collaboration – is key to a system that works and that people feel safe using.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information and for your continued efforts to improve Maine's behavioral health system. I'm happy to answer any questions.

Submitted by:

Michelle Hansen, LSCW, MBA

Senior Director of Crisis Services

The Opportunity Alliance

50 Lydia Lane

South Portland, Maine

Michelle.Hansen@opportunityalliance.org