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May 15, 2025

Senator Henry Ingwersen, Chair
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 1216 – *An Act to Improve Behavioral Health Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention Services*

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide information neither for nor against LD 1216, *An Act to Improve Behavioral Health Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention Services*.

This bill, as amended, defines in statute the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and includes a component that, as part of a 911 call and as appropriate, there is a referral or transfer to 988. This bill requires OBH to submit a status report by January 30, 2026, related to the coordination of services including any suggested legislation to both the HHS Committee and the EUT Committee.

The Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) appreciates the intent of this proposed legislation, and in particular the intent to ensure smooth transfer of appropriate calls from 911 to 988. As part of broader work in response to PL 2023, Ch. 643 Part DDDD-2, OBH has worked with the Emergency Services Communication Bureau at the Public Utilities Commission to ensure the coordination of services under the State's E-9-1-1 system and the State's 9-8-8 mobile crisis system.

It would be the recommendation of OBH to delay any additional expectations regarding transfer of call between 911 and 988 until the results of this work have concluded to ensure a continued focus on existing efforts rather than introducing new ones. Importantly, while there are some ongoing efforts to ensure that dispatchers are appropriately trained in identifying and transferring mental health calls, significantly more effort is needed to ensure appropriate protocol and a trained workforce to better assess and assist callers in crisis.

Thank you again for the time and interest in this work.

Sincerely,

Sarah Squirrell

Sarah Squirrell
Director
Office of Behavioral Health
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Excerpted from PL 2023, Ch. 643:

Sec. DDDD-2. E-9-1-1 and 9-8-8 coordination. By January 30, 2025, the Department of Health and Human Services, in coordination with the Public Utilities Commission, Emergency Services Communication Bureau and the Department of Public Safety, shall ensure the coordination of services under the State's E-9-1-1 system and the State's 9-8-8 mobile crisis services system. By January 30, 2026, the Department of Health and Human Services shall submit a status report related to the coordination of services, including suggested legislation, to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters and to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over utilities matters. The joint standing committees may each submit a bill relating to the report to the Second Regular Session of the 132nd Legislature.