

Testimony in Support of
An Act to Improve Behavioral Health Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention Services – LD 1216
May 15, 2025

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Adam Bloom-Paicopolos. Most of you all know me as the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine. But today, I come before you as a private citizen, a resident of Wells, and mental health advocate with lived experience alongside my colleagues from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP).

AFSP is a nationwide organization dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide, including those with personal lived experience or who have experienced a loss. I am proud to serve as a Board Member of AFSP's Maine Chapter and help lead the chapter's fully volunteer public policy committee.

I am here today to speak in support of LD 1216, "An Act to Improve Behavioral Health Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention Services" and thank Senator Nangle for bringing this legislation forward.

This bill would cement the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in Maine statute – recognizing the critical role this service plays in our crisis continuum of care and ensuring that this vital suicide prevention resource has the statutory foundation for long-term support and sustainability.

As you have all heard me say throughout this session, Maine is experiencing a behavioral health crisis. Provider reimbursement challenges and workforce shortages have significantly impacted access to behavioral health care in Maine. Average wait times for outpatient services is over 10 months. Maine ranks 31st nationally in suicide mortality rates. In 2023, 274 Mainers died by suicide. Our rural communities – where access to care challenges and isolation are often exacerbated – have experienced particularly high suicide death rates, with Somerset, Piscataquis, and Washington counties seeing rates as high as 29, 25, and 24 deaths per 100,000 since 2017, respectively.

988 is an invaluable resource to combat these trends and offer a critical localized lifeline of support. 988 was launched in July of 2022 as the nationwide call line for individuals in crisis – replacing varied state-specific lines, the lengthy and often cumbersome national hotline, and most importantly, calls to 911 to avoid unnecessary law enforcement encounters that may lead to additional trauma. The 988 program is designed to be a locally driven service with a national backup call center to handle overflow. As of February 2025, the nationwide average time to answer a call was 34 seconds, with calls lasting nearly 14 minutes. The national answer rate through 2025 is 92%, up from just 79% at launch in 2022.

We know that 988 works at saving lives, and we have seen the model grow more responsive to local community needs since implementation. States have relied on federal grants from SAMHSA to support their 988 programs thus far – but many have begun to explore more long-term sustainable funding solutions such as telecom fees (like 911) or state appropriations as the federal picture becomes more uncertain. By enshrining 988 in statute, LD 1216 is an important step towards achieving sustainability.

I respectfully urge you to support LD 1216 to enable Maine to join the growing list of states making this commitment to suicide prevention by establishing 988 in Maine state statute.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this morning. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Bloom-Paicopolos', with a stylized, flowing script.

Adam Bloom-Paicopolos, MPP