

**Testimony for LD 1216: "An Act to Improve Behavioral Health Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention Services"**

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Committee on Health and Human Services  
Maine State Legislature  
State House, Augusta, ME

**Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and Honorable Members of the Committee,**

My name is Dr. Kristin Tugman, and I am from Gorham, Maine. I am here to express my support for LD 1216, which seeks to enhance behavioral health crisis services and codify the 988-suicide prevention hotline in Maine. I ask for your support as well.

I am on the board of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention for the Maine state chapter, and I have been a mental health clinician for over 30 years. I have and currently work as a private practice clinician and have spent 25 years attempting to improve workplace mental health through health and productivity consulting with employers. In 2018 I saw a change in my work. When the CDC came out with their report indicating that suicide rates had gone up in almost every state, I saw employers and communities start to take mental health more seriously and look diligently for solutions. In 2018, 1 in 5 of us were noted to experience a mental health condition in a given year- 20% of us. At that time, what I told employers was that mental health conditions are not uncommon and as a result, it is highly likely that you will encounter someone in your workplace, in your family, or in your community that is struggling this year. Mental health conditions are not uncommon. In 2020 when COVID hit, we were already in a mental health crisis and as we emerged from COVID, we have seen the crisis only exacerbate. Johns Hopkins found that in 2024 mental health conditions rose to 1 in 4 each year: now up to 25% of us.

As I have studied the mental health crisis over the years, there are 3 things that perpetuate it; lack of awareness, we don't equate mental health with physical health and often have a difficult time recognizing an emerging mental health condition among our co-workers, family members and community members, we continue to experience stigma which leaves people feeling alone with nowhere to turn during mental health challenges, and we struggle with access to care. In Maine, the average wait time to see a mental health clinician is 8 months.

This simple act of codifying 988 as the suicide prevention lifeline in Maine will go a long way to address all three of these factors. The bill will help to equate 988 with 911 whereby starting us on the path of equalizing mental and physical health while also helping us to reduce stigma. In addition, it will improve access to behavioral health crisis and suicide prevention intervention for our community members so that folks will have greater access to the help that they need at the time that they need it.

There is a lot of work left to be done to mitigate this crisis but I hope you will consider supporting this bill as it will help us take a step forward toward raising awareness, normalizing mental health and reducing stigma while improving access to crisis support that will help save lives.

Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

Kristin Tugman, PhD, LPC, CRC

#### References:

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