

Caitie Whelan, PO Box 2389, South Portland

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the committee. My name is Caitie Whelan, a Mainer born and raised, and I am here in support of LD 1216.

I am terrifically grateful to Senator Nangle for his leadership on the bill, and his dynamite aide Alex Kennedy. We wouldn't be here if it weren't for you.

There is a photo of me and my Mum from Halloween 2021 that I can't look at anymore. In it, I am dressed as a tiger and she is dressed as a ghost. We're seated at the end of our driveway giving away Snickers to trick or treaters.

Sixteen hours later, my parents would open up their emails to find my oldest brother's suicide note. After calling the police in Miami where he lived, calling family members, calling anyone they could think of, they got a call from the Miami PD that he had been found dead – as we would soon learn by his own hand.

Suicides are easily flattened down into statistics. But let me make my brother Bill 3-D for you.

As a little kid, he once found our mother crying and brought her his favorite stuffed animal. As a teenager in Pembroke, he raked blueberries in the summer and split wood for the family woodstove in the winter.

When my folks moved to South Portland, he played guard and forward on the state championship basketball team, a teammate would later describe him as South Portland's equivalent of Bill Bradley.

Bill was that singular combination of incredibly kind and incredibly cool: he bought me a bike and taught me how to ride it and he bought me a Pet Shop Boys album and taught me how to appreciate music.

He went to Harvard, lettered in basketball there. He played bass in a band that signed with RCA, he designed award-winning campaigns for Volkswagen. But his mind was becoming a harder and harder place to be. And despite intervention after invention, he found himself hopeless on October 31, 2021.

That's why I can't look at that photo from Halloween. I will forever associate it with the last day my brother was alive. And I am gutted thinking how incredibly lonely that day must have been for Bill. How his mind had become a dark tunnel he couldn't get out of.

But here's the thing about 988: it's an exit ramp out of that tunnel. Our laws should be a reflection of our values, and Senator Nangle's bill would put 988 - the suicide and crisis lifeline - into Maine statute.

It's not every day we get to do something that saves lives. But you can, and I respectfully request that you do, by voting this bill out of Committee. And I ask on behalf not just of my brother, but of every Mainer who has ever felt trapped in that dark tunnel and needs an exit ramp out.

Thank you.