



Timothy Nangle
Senator, District 26

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Senator Tim Nangle introducing
LD 1216, "An Act to Improve Behavioral Health Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention Services"

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
May 15, 2025*

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, as you know, my name is Tim Nangle. I proudly represent Senate District 26, which includes the communities of Casco, Frye Island, Raymond, Windham, and part of Westbrook. I am here today to present LD 1216, "An Act to Improve Behavioral Health Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention Services."

The goal of this bill is straightforward but critical: to formally recognize 988 as Maine's crisis and suicide prevention lifeline in our state laws. While 988 has been a vital national resource since its launch, it currently lacks a clear place in Maine statute. What 988 is and what it does is not defined anywhere in our laws. This bill seeks to address that gap.

988 is *truly* a lifeline for Mainers experiencing a behavioral health crisis, suicidal thoughts, or emotional distress. It provides free, confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Currently, many Mainers are unaware of this critical resource, despite the significant need.

Consider this:

- Maine's suicide rate stands at 18.47 per 100,000 people, notably higher than the national average of 14.2 deaths per 100,000.
- In 2023, Cumberland County alone lost 43 residents to suicide.
- Statewide, we lose an average of 265 Mainers to suicide each year.

Every one of these lives represents a family, a community, and a future lost too soon. One is too many; 265 is an unimaginable tragedy.

This bill, through the amendment you have before you, is quite simple. It places the 988 suicide and crisis lifeline within Maine's statutes, as part of the definitions in the emergency medical dispatch section.

I want to be crystal clear: this is not a mandate or a new operational requirement for our dispatch centers. It simply allows dispatchers to transfer a call to 988 when it is clinically appropriate, without requiring them to do so.

When we began this process, we worked closely with the Revisor's Office, NAMI, and the committee's legislative analyst to find the least disruptive way to codify these definitions. The



Timothy Nangle
Senator, District 26

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Revisor's drafting manual wouldn't allow us to create standalone definitions in statute, as definitions must be tied to a specific, actionable section of law. That is why we chose to place these definitions within the emergency medical dispatch section, where they can exist without unintentionally altering current dispatch practices or imposing new obligations.

Instead, this amendment provides a foundation for potential collaboration between our 911 and 988 systems, should it ever become appropriate to do so in the future.

The timing is critical. As we have seen with other vital programs, federal support can shift, sometimes unpredictably. By enshrining 988 in state law, we can take the first steps toward ensuring that Mainers in crisis have reliable, consistent access to this lifesaving support, regardless of what happens at the federal level. This bill helps ensure that, regardless of the national landscape, Maine will always have a foundation in place to support those in need.

By passing LD 1216, we can ensure that our laws reflect the importance of mental health, just as they do for physical health. We can take a small but significant step toward reducing the stigma around mental health crises and ensuring that no Mainer faces these struggles alone.

I urge this Committee to support LD 1216 and to help raise awareness about the 988 lifeline among your constituents.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.