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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

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A N A C T

RELATING TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND  
HOSPITALS -- 988 CALL CENTER AND BH LINK OPERATIONS ACT

Introduced By: Senators Murray, Lawson, Ciccone, Tikoian, and LaMountain

Date Introduced: March 12, 2026

Referred To: Senate Health & Human Services

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Legislative findings.

2 The general assembly finds that:

3 (1) Access to suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis intervention is essential to  
4 protecting public health and safety;

5 (2) Congress enacted the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020, Pub. L. No.  
6 116-172, 134 Stat. 832 (2020) which authorized states to implement and fund a 988 crisis hotline;

7 (3) The State of Rhode Island must create a reliable, sustainable funding source to support  
8 its 988 call center infrastructure;

9 (4) The state launched BH Link, a 24/7 triage facility serving individuals in crisis due to  
10 mental health, substance use conditions and co-occurring disorders in 2018 and, since 2022, has  
11 been serving as a crisis outreach and stabilization service center in response to 988 calls; and

12 (5) The designated 988 call center must operate independently from state agencies and  
13 focus exclusively on the core responsibilities of answering 988 calls, texts, and chats, consistent  
14 with federal law.

15 SECTION 2. Title 40.1 of the General Laws entitled "BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,  
16 DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND HOSPITALS" is hereby amended by adding thereto  
17 the following chapter:

18 [CHAPTER 30](#)

1 988 CALL CENTER AND BH LINK OPERATIONS ACT

2 **40.1-30-1. Definitions.**

3 As used in this chapter:

4 (1) "988 call center" means the designated, non-governmental entity operating the federally  
5 approved in-state contact center for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline authorized under the  
6 National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020, Pub. L. No. 116-172, 134 Stat. 832 (2020),  
7 exclusively responsible for answering and responding to 988 contacts originating in Rhode Island.

8 (2) "988 contact" means a communication with the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline system  
9 within the United States operating through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline or its successor  
10 via modalities offered, including call, chat, or text.

11 (3) "BH Link" means a crisis outreach and stabilization service center providing short term  
12 services with capacity for diagnosis, initial management, observation, crisis stabilization, and  
13 follow up referral services to all persons in response to 988 contacts, pursuant to chapter 23-17.26,  
14 and the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020, Pub. L. No. 116-172, 134 Stat. 832  
15 (2020).

16 (4) "Crisis receiving and stabilization centers" are facilities, including BH Link, providing  
17 short term services of up to twenty-four (24) hours with capacity for diagnosis, initial management,  
18 observation, crisis stabilization and follow up referral services to all persons.

19 (5) "Lifeline administrator" means the entity that contracts with the Substance Abuse and  
20 Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to oversee in excess of two hundred (200)  
21 contact centers and ensures they meets all requirements.

22 (6) "Operator" means the nonprofit entity designated to oversee the 988 call center pursuant  
23 to § 40.1-30-3.

24 (7) "State or related public health authority" means the department of behavioral  
25 healthcare, developmental disabilities and hospitals.

26 (8) "Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ("SAMHSA")" means  
27 the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health  
28 efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation.

29 **40.1-30-2. 988 and BH Link crisis services systems established.**

30 (a) The director is hereby authorized to designate and fully fund the 988 call center, BH  
31 Link, and other similar crisis receiving and stabilization centers to provide for diagnosis, initial  
32 management, observation, crisis stabilization, and follow up referral services to all persons in  
33 response to 988 contacts.

34 (b) Appropriate state and federal funds, as well as private and public grant funds shall be

1 used to support the 988 call center and BH Link budgets to:

2 (1) Operate, staff, and maintain the 988 call center;

3 (2) Acquire, upgrade, and maintain technology or telecommunications infrastructure for

4 988 call center use;

5 (3) Provide required training for call center staff in accordance with federal 988 program

6 standards;

7 (4) Provide acute mental health crisis outreach and stabilization services through BH Link

8 in direct response to 988 and mental health crisis calls as authorized by the National Suicide Hotline

9 Designation Act of 2020, Pub. L. No. 116-172, 134 Stat. 832 (2020); and

10 (5) Conduct public awareness and first responder outreach efforts about the availability

11 and use of 988 and BH Link.

12 (c) Funding for the 988 call center and BH Link shall not be used to:

13 (1) Expand into service areas beyond those allowed by the National Suicide Hotline

14 Designation Act or implementing SAMHSA guidance; or

15 (2) Fund operations, staff, or administration of any state agency.

16 **40.1-30-3. Governance and independence of 988 call center operations.**

17 (a) The 988 call center shall be operated by a nonprofit entity appointed by the general

18 assembly and approved by the lifeline administrator designated by SAMHSA in accordance with

19 federal grant requirements.

20 (b) The call center shall operate collaboratively with all Rhode Island executive

21 departments and shall not be subject to oversight, direction, or operational control by any sole state

22 agency.

23 (c) The operator may establish an advisory board to promote compliance with national

24 standards and best practices. An advisory board, if established at the direction of the operator, shall

25 consist of professionals with expertise in children, adolescent, and adult behavioral health.

26 **40.1-30-4. Oversight and reporting.**

27 (a) The operator shall submit an annual report to the general assembly by February 1 of

28 each year detailing:

29 (1) Revenue by category including, but not limited to, grants, and appropriations;

30 (2) Expenditures by category including, but not limited to, staffing, training, and

31 technology; and

32 (3) Service performance metrics including, but not limited to, call volume, wait times, and

33 abandonments.

34 (b) The Rhode Island auditor general shall conduct an annual audit of the 988 call center

1 and BH Link operations and funding and provide the results to the speaker of the house; the  
2 president of the senate; the house of representatives finance committee chair; and the senate finance  
3 committee chair.

4 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect on July 1, 2027.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND  
HOSPITALS -- 988 CALL CENTER AND BH LINK OPERATIONS ACT

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1           This act would establish the operations necessary for a 988 hotline for suicide prevention  
2           and behavioral health crisis management. This act would also establish the operations necessary  
3           for acute mental health crisis outreach and stabilization services in direct response to the 988  
4           hotline.

5           This act would take effect on July 1, 2027.

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