

December 1, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: \$30 million Proposal in the 988 Mental Health Crisis Line for January Budget

Dear Governor Newsom:

The below signed organizations – co-sponsors of Assembly Bill 988 (Bauer-Kahan) – are pleased to recommend for your consideration the inclusion of a \$30 million allocation to fund critical infrastructure for the 988 mental health crisis line in your January budget. This funding would build off your historic investments into behavioral health this year and particularly your initial outlay in the 988 mental health crisis line, which launches on July 16, 2022.

In 2020, Congress unanimously passed and the President signed legislation establishing “988” as the new three-digit number to increase access to suicide prevention and mental health crisis services. Existing California National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Centers (California Crisis Centers) will become the operators and counselors for 988. Without necessary funding to prepare for the nearly 300% increase in anticipated call volume when 988 goes live in July 2022, people in crisis will sit on hold and calls will go unanswered preventing people in crisis from accessing lifesaving care.

It is no exaggeration to say that in these crises, every second matters and without proper funding people will die.

Year 1 Budget Needs: We are incredibly grateful to you and to DHCS for recognizing this urgent need and setting aside \$20 million to prepare California call centers for this launch. While this tremendous initial investment will provide much needed relief to the call centers, more is needed to fund planning, technology, and staff training essential to the launch. The call centers project that they will need a total of **\$50 million in year 1** to adjust to the anticipated call volume. Therefore, the below signed organizations respectfully requests an additional \$30 million to fully fund California call centers for the first year of 988 implementation.

Skyrocketing Call Volumes in the First Year of 988: In the first year of 988, California Crisis Centers anticipate a significant increase in calls, texts, and chats for four reasons:

- (1) When services are more accessible more people access them. Replacing a ten-digit “1-800” number with an easy-to-remember three-digit number will make accessing resources easier than ever.
- (2) The anticipated nearly 300% increase in contact volume driven by 988 comes on top of exponential volume increases in recent years. California Crisis Centers have seen a

67% increase in call volume over the last 5 years. One California Crisis Center even saw a 30% increase in call volume year-over-year. This rise in call volume has been further exacerbated by COVID-19 with many California Crisis Centers seeing a 30 - 40% increase over just the past 18 months.

- (3) National publicity is getting the word out about a new number and new services. Promoting 988 will also raise public awareness about the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline leading to an increase in calls. This, coupled with the number being publicized as a “mental health crisis line,” will draw a wider array of people and significantly higher volume of people than a hotline publicized as a “suicide prevention hotline” or even “disaster distress hotline.” In addition, intentional or not, 988 will draw people seeking alternatives to 911.
- (4) The long-term behavioral health impact of COVID-19 is just beginning to show. People have started to emerge from nearly two years of isolation, and California Crisis Centers anticipate significant impacts from untreated mental health conditions, substance use disorder conditions, and significantly altered interpersonal dynamics.

Unfunded Connection Between 988 and 911 Could Lead to Fatal Outcomes: It is essential that 988 and 911 be able to transfer calls between one another – this, however, is not funded by the \$20 million allocation. Without this connection callers to 911 will be met with a police response when they could have been safely served by a trained 988 professional. Meanwhile callers to 988 requiring an immediate in person response by police or EMS will be – such as those with a firearm or those experiencing an overdose – will be told to hang up and dial 911, which would undoubtedly lead to preventable tragedies.

The most technologically and financially efficient solution is to move the 988 infrastructure onto the same technology platform as 911. This will allow for the seamless transfer of calls between both numbers and ensuring that 988 transfers are appropriately triaged by 911.

While the \$20 million contract between DHCS and the call centers allows for call centers to link to 911 infrastructure, this would not include moving 988 onto the same platform as 911 nor would it fund the Office of Emergency Services (OES) as the state's 911 administrator to do this technology merger between the two numbers.

In addition to providing additional funding to the call centers for planning, technology, and staffing, we request that a portion of the \$30 million fund putting 988 onto the same technology platform as 911 and funding OES to implement this merger.

Why California Must Fund California Crisis Centers This Year: As states across the country have failed to properly invest in 988, public concerns are rising that the launch of 988 will be just another failed government launch such as HealthCare.gov. California crisis centers have been planning for this increase and are ready and able to respond but need additional funding to scale up their operations, procure necessary technology, implement their response strategies, or sustain their services in the years ahead.

California has the opportunity to lead the country in its implementation of 988, which will save lives from day 1 and for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight our proposal for the 988 mental health crisis line for your January budget. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact the Steinberg Institute Legislative Advocate, Tara Gamboa-Eastman, at (415) 265-7484 or at tara@steinberginstitute.org.

Sincerely,



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cc:

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Commission

California 988 First Year Cost Model for Crisis Centers		
Crisis Center Contacts		
Number of centers		13
Crisis Center Staffing		
Total FTEs		508
Counselors FTEs		305
Supervisors FTEs		52
Quality Assurance FTEs		8
Program Manager FTEs		13
Workforce Manager FTEs		13
Resource Specialist FTEs		13
Staffing & Scheduling FTEs		13
Non-dedicated FTEs*		91
Average annual salary per counselor FTE		\$ 65,000
Cost per Contact		
	<i>Volume</i>	<i>Cost per Contact</i>
Total	664,400	\$ 74.84
Inbound calls	376,900	\$ 60.22
Outbound calls	18,800	\$ 37.64
Chat	253,800	\$ 100.37
Text (dedicated labor time)	14,900	\$56.46
Total Projected Costs		
		\$ 49,723,346
Shared capital		\$ 1,674,868
Shared management		\$ 8,922,411
Shared expense		\$ 2,553,485
Dedicated capital		\$ 82,230
Dedicated expense		\$ 1,518,376
Dedicated personnel		\$ 34,971,976

* Non-dedicated FTEs are apportioned at 50% of the following positions: Contact Center Director, Contact Center Manager, HR Manager, Accountant, Recruiter, Trainer, and IT support.