

Ohio House of Representatives Behavioral Health Committee

Joan Englund, Executive Director
HB 571 Proponent Testimony – Written Only
November 20, 2024

Chairwoman Pavliga, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brewer, and House Behavioral Health Committee members, my name is Joan Englund, Executive Director of the Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition (MHAC). Comprised of over 130 member organizations statewide, the MHAC unifies diverse local voices to increase awareness and advance policies that support the well-being of people with mental health and addiction disorders.

Thank you for considering this written testimony in support of House Bill 571, which aims to include the national 988 suicide and crisis hotline number on school IDs, planners, and online portals. In recent years, state and local officials have made significant progress in establishing and improving the operation of 988 at 19 call centers throughout the state. A crucial next step in the implementation process is to continue to raise awareness and build trust in the 988 system among Ohio residents. HB 571 presents a valuable opportunity to enhance recognition of this life-saving resource for our youth and their families.

The Ohio Department of Health lists suicide as the second leading cause of death for youth aged 10-24 in Ohio. In addition, the following statistics from Mental Health America's 2024 State of Mental Health in America report show that significant numbers of youth (ages 12-17) in Ohio are struggling with their mental health:

- 21% had at least one major depressive episode in the past year
- 13% had serious thoughts of suicide
- 52% of youth with major depression did not receive any mental health treatment

Ohio's young people need to know where to turn for help and House Bill 571 offers an easily accessible lifeline for youth who may not otherwise know where to find support in a crisis.

We also support the amendment that would provide students and their parents with information about declarations for mental health as part of the new student orientation process at Ohio colleges and universities. Students and their families need to have access to this important information long before a mental health crisis occurs.

We are grateful for the committee's thoughtful consideration of this legislation and appreciate the chance to submit testimony.