



Representative Gail Pavliga

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chairman LaRe, and Ranking member Rose-Sweeney and members of the house Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House bill 231. HB 231 establishes the 9-8-8 fund and codifies the 9-8-8 administrator position under the Ohio Department of Mental health and Addiction Services.

On average, there are 132 suicides per day. According to the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention, suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the United States. Rates are even higher among veterans and other at-risk communities. Nearly everyone has been touched by suicide in some way. And every day, signs for help were missed, and lives are lost.

That is why Congress created the 988 program. The hotline is staffed by crisis call centers throughout the state. The crisis call centers are supported by mobile crisis teams, which enable licensed mental health service providers to respond to mental health emergencies in place of or in conjunction with law enforcement. It provides those in mental health crises with the specialized support they need, while saving police departments valuable time and money.

As of the first of this year, Ohio's 988 program has experienced 8,671 calls per month, and 3,368 texts and chats a month. Ohio expanded the number of state Lifeline call centers from 12 to 19 this year, ensuring that all 88 counties have access to coverage.

Ohio is funding the first-year operations using federal funding. However, we need a long-term solution. That is why our bill will create the 9-8-8 fund to ensure future financial stability. Once money is allocated towards 9-8-8 the funding cannot be pulled back. Establishing the fund and consistent application of internal funding will be the first steps in expanding emergency services for 9-8-8.

This bill saves lives.

I would like to thank my joint sponsor, Representative Adam Miller, who unfortunately cannot be here today after the passing of his brother. Rep Miller has been a champion for mental health services and I am pleased to work alongside him on this bill.

I want to mention a few key points of this bill that he would like stated.

HB 231 has the ability to provide the stable, long-term funding for 9-8-8 program needs. Our constituents need to know that 9-8-8 will be there for them and our local Addiction and Mental Health Boards need to know they will have a consistent framework to provide services from.

Establishing the fund and codifying the services will ensure smaller counties where services are still needed will be able to traverse economic downturns, and that the care will remain localized and not consolidated into our large population centers.

In short, we want to safeguard 9-8-8 and the expanded mental health services from the political changes that may occur over time.

Thank you again to Chair Edwards and the rest of the members of the Finance Committee for hearing HB 231. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.