

[OSPF Logo]
Tony Coder, Executive Director
Interested Party Testimony Before the Ohio Senate Health Committee
May 10, 2023

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today on behalf of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF). My name is Tony Coder and I serve as the Foundation's executive director.

The Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation is a non-profit organization that works to prevent one of our most preventable causes of death: suicide. OSPF works with providers, educators, loss survivors, local community organizations, employers, health plans and families across the state to provide community based programs to all Ohioans.

While we are very supportive of several portions of the budget before you as passed by the Ohio House of Representatives, we ask that you please consider making some changes to the reductions made by the House.

9-8-8

In 2020, the FCC adopted rules to transition the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline from a 10-digit number to a 3-digit number, 988. The law gave power to states to enact 988 based on their system of care – but also required states to fund the line starting in July 2023. Last year, the new National Suicide Crisis Lifeline 9-8-8 went live across Ohio, where we have 19 operating 9-8-8 call centers.

In the first month, 988 calls increased by 39% and texts increased by 603% and averaging 7,000-10,000 calls per month. Recent studies show that approximately 80% of calls can be handled via 9-8-8 without the person needing emergency services - this alleviates strain on 9-1-1, first responders and hospitals if callers are able to be stabilized by utilizing 9-8-8.

Governor DeWine recommended \$20.7 million for FY24 and \$25.8 million for FY25 in his budget and the Ohio House did not alter the Governor's recommendation. We wholeheartedly support the allocation proposed by the Governor and passed by the House. However, continued and sustained funding for 9-8-8 is critical. OSPF supports funding measures whether through a specified funding allotment in the State of Ohio budget process or applying a small fee to mobile devices, which some states have enacted. But we need more data to determine what's best for Ohio. It is our hope that you will support language we have drafted to enact a 9-8-8 study committee for the General Assembly to work collaboratively with mental healthcare advocates and telecom providers to make recommendations on the sustainability of the state's 9-8-8 funding in the longterm. We are committed to ensuring every Ohioan has access to quality care to prevent suicides.

Budget Funding for Suicide Prevention

Funding mental health treatment and suicide prevention programs goes further than just improving quality of life – it can also increase Ohio's opportunity to improve economic growth. The issues of mental health wellness and suicide prevention are crucial to creating a productive workforce, healthy families, and healthy neighborhoods. With five people lost to suicide every day in Ohio, these losses traumatize families and communities, so prioritizing funding for mental health and suicide prevention in the 2024-

2025 budget is key to ensuring strong and healthy communities. Continued support of Programs like VitalCog which provides suicide prevention training in the workplace, QPR (Question Persuade, Refer), Sources of Strength and others ensures all communities and Ohioans from all backgrounds have access critical life saving training and information for prevention.

State Plan Implementation

A three-year plan for all Ohioans rooted in research and best practices that aims to reduce suicides every year, until not one life is lost. The State Plan is created by a group of roughly 35 diverse stakeholders across Ohio, including suicide prevention experts, providers, MCOs, State Agencies, coalitions, suicide loss survivors, and others.

One major theme of the plan is to improve systems to facilitate early identification of those considering suicide, and how to respond effectively and appropriately in the least restrictive way. The plan will be implemented at the individual, local, and state level. Each level will have various interventions. Funding in the budget will help implement this plan starting in July 2023 through 2025.

Governor DeWine recommended funding for suicide prevention and wellness measures totaling \$16 million each fiscal year. The House reduced that line item by more than 50% to \$3.35 million annually. As you are finalizing your version of the Senate budget, we implore you to reinstate the Governor's recommended funding for this line item. Consider the statistics:

- 5 Ohioans a day die by suicide across the state. And an average of 162 people is impacted by suicide.
- Suicide is the leading cause of death for youth ages 10-14 – one youth die by suicide every 35 hours.
- 16 of the 17 counties with highest rates of Suicide in Ohio are rural/agricultural counties.
- Suicides among Black Ohioans have increased 56% over the past 14 years, compared to a 34% increase for white Ohioans.
- Ohioans ages 25-64 remain the most likely to die by suicide, although rates have increased for all ages since 2007.

We are at a critical juncture in the State of Ohio. **Plainly, the funding from the dollars for 9-8-8 and the funds we are asking you to reinstate for suicide prevention will help save lives.**

We are grateful for the willingness of the General Assembly to hear our collective remarks today. Thank you and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.