



The Ohio Senate Finance Committee
HB96 Testimony
June 6, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB96 and the impact that the sub bill would have on the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and suicide prevention programming.

My name is Tony Coder and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, a non-profit focused on breaking stigma around suicide, but also providing strategies for communities, individuals and families to improve opportunities for mental health wellness.

Ohio loses, on average, five Ohioans to suicide every day. More than 80% of Ohio's suicides are men and the highest number of suicides are among men ages 25-34. Suicide is also the second leading cause of death in children ages 10-19.

Over the past two decades, we had seen a steady increase in suicides, and the impacts of COVID only increased the numbers. But finally, we saw a glimmer of hope. In the State of Ohio Suicide Report released earlier this year, we finally saw a reduction in suicide deaths in 2024.

We are beginning to see the investments in mental health and suicide prevention are having an impact. Even more encouraging was that we saw a 6% decrease in suicides among children.

The current version of the Senate budget will not help us continue this trend. By investing less in prevention in Ohio, as well as massively underfunding 988, an initiative that was signed into law by President Trump in 2020, we are truly ignoring those individuals and families in Ohio communities who are suffering or who need the tools and strategies to prevent another suicide death.

I appreciate the situation that you are in, with so many competing interests during. But funding prevention and 988 saves money, time and lives. 988 helps

to keep people out of emergency rooms and helps law enforcement stick to public safety concerns, as opposed to responding to mental health issues. The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services has created a 988 system that answers 98% of Ohio calls within the state with 80% of those calls being able to be addressed on the phone without law enforcement or a visit to the emergency room. That is what we need.

Prevention is also key in helping keep treatment and recovery rates down. Sources of Strength, a suicide prevention program that teaches strategies on caring for oneself and building upon a child's strength, that we administer and that is funded through prevention dollars through OhioMHAS, currently serves more than 400 schools and about 186,000 children. An evaluation of this program released earlier this year showed that schools that implemented this program reduced suicide attempts by 29%.

Much like any other preventative health strategy, if we can get to a problem early or even before someone begins considering suicide, we have a much better chance at saving lives. If I have to wait until the person is deeply considering suicide, my chances of saving that life decrease tremendously.

I'm urging you to concur with the House proposed budget for prevention and wellness and restore the \$2.5 million for suicide prevention crisis response, as well as increase 988 funding to truly save lives.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.