

Don Schiffbauer, CEO
Riveon Mental Health and Recovery
HB 96 Testimony – Senate Health Committee
May 13, 2025

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for House Bill 96. My name is Don Schiffbauer. I am the chief executive officer for Riveon Mental Health and Recovery. A community behavioral health agency serving Lorain, Cuyahoga, Erie and Huron counties. Riveon is also a member of the following organizations: Ohio Council of Behavioral Health Providers, Ohio Alliance of Recovery Providers, Ohio Behavioral Health Provider Network. We are also one of nineteen 988 call centers in Ohio.

I am here to express my support for the continued and increased funding of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. This vital service has proven to be a lifeline for countless Ohioans, providing immediate crisis intervention and support. The following are several key points regarding the importance and impact of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Goals of 988

The primary goal of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is to provide immediate, accessible crisis intervention and support to individuals experiencing mental health, substance use, or suicidal crises. By dialing 988, individuals are connected to trained crisis counselors who offer highly skilled, compassionate care centered on helping to de-escalate situations, providing necessary support and where available, dispatching mobile crisis response 24/7.

Value to Behavioral Health and the Community

The 988 Lifeline brings immense value to our behavioral health system and the broader community. It serves as a critical entry point for individuals in crisis, ensuring they receive timely and appropriate care when they need it. This service helps to reduce the burden on emergency departments and law enforcement by providing an alternative, specialized response to behavioral health crises. Getting people to the right type of care immediately also reduces healthcare costs and first responder costs in local communities.

Increasing Call Growth

The 988 Lifeline has seen significant growth in call volume, reflecting its ease of use and growing popularity. Since its launch in July 2023, call volume at Riveon has increased by 63%. The simplicity of a three-digit number makes it more accessible, leading to increased utilization. This exponential growth underscores the need for robust infrastructure and staffing to manage the rising demand.

Lifesaving Access and Care Delivery

The 988 Lifeline is particularly crucial in areas where access to emergent services is sparse. It provides lifesaving access to care, ensuring that individuals in remote or underserved areas can receive immediate support. This service is a critical component of our public health infrastructure, helping to prevent tragedies and connect individuals to ongoing care. At Riveon a substantial percentage of calls are resolved by our trained staff through the crisis intervention, support and connection the call offers.

Need for Increased Staffing

To maintain the reliability and quality of crisis call center services, it is essential to be responsive to required staffing levels. The growing call volume necessitates a well-staffed and well-trained workforce to ensure that every call is answered promptly and effectively, which is vital to delivering high-quality, reliable crisis intervention. At Riveon, 99% are answered by a hotline clinician with an average answer time of 2 seconds.

Actual Life Saved:

On 2/28/25 someone who answers for the crisis line would have received a call from a 10-year-old girl regarding her friend who is around the same age and was sending messages with suicidal thoughts. The text conversation involved telling the 10-year-old that she loved her and that she was not okay repeatedly. She had stated that she hated herself, her life, she was stressed out, overwhelmed and wanted to end her life. The 10-year-old seeking to help her asked her what happened, but the only response received was that she repeated "I love you" and "I'm not okay." The 10-year-old had been exposed to the 988 number through a magnet on a fridge and dryer in her home and through conversations with her mother. She made the call to 988 on her own. The 988 caller called her mother right after as the friend was mad and the 10-year-old caller was hysterical over the thought of her friend and what she went through.

That 10-year-old girl that made that call was the daughter of one of our own addiction counselors Lisa. Her name is Charity Grace. According to her Lisa, what stood out was the importance of the simplicity of this number. And Charity Grace, having seen the magnets for the crisis line in her house, she instinctively called the number. What also should be noted was that she made the call and did not have any apprehension. Lisa's daughter called her mom right after making the call to 988. Charity Grace told her mom she was not comfortable speaking to anyone about what was being shared between her and her friend; yet she felt her friend was in need and felt that she had to help her. And so, she picked up her phone and dialed three simple numbers. Calling 988 and speaking with a trained clinician, eventually led to her friend's parents' involvement and brought awareness to what was happening with their child sooner rather than later when it might have been too late.

Request for Funding Restoration

In light of the significant benefits, outlined above, the growing demand for the 988 Lifeline and the story of an Ohio 10-year-old girl acting and potentially saving the life of friend, I respectfully ask that this assembly support the funding initially introduced by Governor DeWine. This funding is crucial to sustaining and expanding the Lifeline's capacity to serve Ohioans in crisis. Ensuring stable and adequate funding will allow the Lifeline to continue saving lives and providing essential support to our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.