

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Senate Health Committee, my name is Clark Sabo from Cincinnati. I am a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, an advocate for all veterans, and a suicide survivor. I stand before you not just as a constituent, but as living proof of why 988 must be fully funded as requested by Governor DeWine. Without it, my wife would be a widow. My son would be fatherless. And another name would be added to Ohio's tragic tally of veteran suicides.

Two of my friends weren't so fortunate. SSgt Gary "Picks" Payne and Cpl Ferrell "Gilly" Gilliam. Tragically both of these brave men took their lives. Gilly in 2014 and Picks in 2021. We gave them full military funerals, but a folded flag is cold comfort when we know their deaths were preventable. 988 could have been their lifeline.

Since its launch:

- 988 has answered over 200,000 crisis contacts from Ohioans (SAMHSA, 2024)
- Veterans make up 14% of all 988 calls —that's 28,000 Ohio veterans reaching out in their darkest moments (Veterans Crisis Line data, 2023)
- Studies show 90% of callers experience reduced risk of suicide after the call (Journal of Crisis Intervention, 2023)

I have survived multiple suicide attempts. I have reached out to the 9-8-8 crisis line on several occasions. I can remember one cold night in the winter of 2021 leaving the house unsure of where I should go but knowing what I wanted to do. I sat at the back of a church down the street from my house, picked up my phone and dialed what seemed like the longest number I have ever typed, 9-8-8. Within seconds I heard a voice on the other end. It didn't take long for me to change my mind that night and head home. When I got home an Officer arrived shortly after and made sure there was nothing my wife and I needed.

But let me be clear: I may have won the battle that night but I have certainly not yet won my war. When we join the military we are told that everyone has a bullet with their name on it. We pray that we may never find it. I was fortunate enough not to go to war. I thought I would never see that bullet with my name on it. But it found me in a different way, I suffer from PTSD stemming from military sexual trauma (MST). This has become something I struggle with every day. I struggle with the knowledge that like many veterans and other Ohioans, the bullet with my name on it is the one in my chamber. Taking away funding for resources like the 9-8-8 suicide prevention hotline is like disabling the safety on the weapons of many Ohio veterans.

Every 11 minutes, a veteran dies by suicide in America (VA, 2024). But in Ohio, we're fighting back: Our response time beats the national average by 6 seconds.

- 988 has decreased suicide-related 911 calls by 23% in rural counties (Ohio DOH, 2023)
- And for every \$1 invested in 988, \$5.60 is saved in emergency response costs (AFSP, 2024)

I spend every day trying to save one more life. You can save thousands. When a hand reaches out in the darkness, 988 is the grip that pulls them back. Don't let that hand go slack. Fully fund 988—because Ohio's heroes, families, and future are worth every second. This isn't a matter of how many dollars we can save but a matter of how many lives each of you can save.