



Senate Health Committee Testimony

May 14, 2025

2:30 pm

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Health Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in favor of the Governor's Budget Proposal on behavioral health and suicide prevention.

My name is Austin Lucas, and I am the Associate Director of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF), a 501c3 non-profit focused on preventing suicide in Ohio, as well as attending to the needs of individuals, families, and communities to assist in preventing suicides at the local level. Our programs range from youth-based suicide prevention through Sources of Strength, which serves over 170,000 youth in over 400 schools across Ohio, to middle-aged men through our Man Therapy program, to older adults and everyone in between. Our work includes reducing the stigma of suicide, promoting evidence-based prevention strategies, and raising awareness about suicide's relationship to mental illness and substance use disorders.

As you know, suicide is a significant health issue in Ohio, with 1,777 people dying by suicide in 2023 –nearly five people every day. We know that approximately 25-30 people are seen every day in Ohio’s emergency rooms with a suicide attempt, and approximately 200 people every day in Ohio’s ERs come in with suicide ideation. This issue impacts children, youth, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults. No one is truly immune.

Investment in behavioral health and prevention not only saves lives, but it also has been shown to save costs to employers in lost time and productivity, costs saved for emergency room visits, later treatment costs, and first responder time and effort.

We are asking this committee and the Ohio Senate to support the investments that the Governor is making in suicide prevention, 988, and crisis care. Suicide prevention programs are such a small investment with such significant dividends in lives saved, but we must also make sure that we have the system in place to truly reach the potential of curbing suicides until not one life is lost.

988 has been a resource to roughly 500,000 people in Ohio through its call, chat, and text system, with an average of

over 18,000 contacts per month. I don't want us to think of these as just calls, though – I want us to understand that nationally, it is estimated that 988 handles about 80% of the crises on the phone, chat, or text, which means that these are people who are given resources to live another day, but also are not going to our emergency rooms or taking the time of first responders. Of course, when those services need to be reached, they are there, but if we can better address and alleviate a person's crisis on a 988 contact, we save time, money, and heartache.

When crisis services are needed, they are needed immediately. We don't expect heart patients who are in cardiac arrest to wait for care – people in a potential suicide crisis shouldn't have to wait, either.

For us to continue to prevent suicide, we have to stay measured, and we have to remain committed to the cause. By funding only a third or a half or three-fourths of the behavioral health system, we will pour dollars into a system destined for failure, and I will give you bad news each time we meet. 1,777 lives are too many, and we must continue to lower that number. Your investments in both long-term suicide prevention programming and the immediate needs of those in crisis both pay high dividends in lives saved and

the economic return to businesses, communities, and systems across Ohio.

Thank you for your time and I will be happy to answer any questions from the committee.