



June 24, 2024

Chairwoman Pavliga, Vice Chairwoman White, Ranking Member Brewer, and Members of the House Behavioral Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony supporting House Bill 571, which requires schools and higher education institutions to include the 988 National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline number on student ID cards, student planners, and electronic portals.

I serve as the Executive Director of Mental Health America of Ohio (MHAOhio), a mental health organization with 68 years of compassionate service. MHAOhio delivers mental health services addressing gaps in the traditional care system by providing access to mental health resources and assisting individuals and families on their well-being journey. As a longstanding member of Mental Health America's 200 affiliates, MHAOhio also addresses systemic issues by managing Franklin County's Suicide Prevention Coalition, leading the Ohio Perinatal Mental Health Task Force, and operating our Workplace Health program, which serves Ohio's behavioral health workforce.

By ensuring that 988 is readily available on student IDs, planners, and digital platforms, Ohio can provide a vital resource to students who may be experiencing emotional distress or suicidal thoughts. Students often face high levels of stress and mental health challenges. Having 988 easily accessible on items they use daily will ensure they're familiar with where to turn for immediate help. The constant presence of 988 will serve as a reminder that support is available and encourage conversations about mental health, reducing stigma and fostering a supportive environment. Lastly, we know that timely access to crisis support can be lifesaving. By making this information ubiquitous, we can potentially reduce the number of suicides and provide critical intervention when it is most needed.

We are grateful for Representative White's leadership in sponsoring this legislation and commend the bill's focus on the mental well-being of students. We believe it aligns with our goals of promoting mental health awareness and providing essential resources to those in need.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions regarding my testimony, please reach out to me at tfulwider@mhaohio.org.

Sincerely,

Tonya Fulwider
Executive Director
Mental Health America of Ohio (MHAOhio)