



Tony Coder, Executive Director

HB 571 Proponent Testimony

June 25, 2024

Chairwoman Pavliga, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brewer and members of the House Behavioral Health Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony in favor of House Bill 571 to include the national suicide and crisis lifeline telephone number on student identification cards, student planners, and electronic portals. My name is Tony Coder and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF), a statewide non-profit that focused on reducing suicides across the lifespan.

We lose five people every day in Ohio with a child dying every day by suicide ever 34 hours and lose approximately 1800 Ohioans every year to suicide. The enormous increases in suicide of Black and African-American teens and young adults over the past 20 years is devastating.

In addition, I get a report every Monday that shares information about the number of suicide attempts and suicide ideations that come into Ohio emergency rooms every day. This report accounts for approximately 90% of the emergency rooms in Ohio. In addition to the suicide deaths, we have, on average, 23 people coming into our emergency rooms every day for a suspected suicide attempt and 171 people coming into our emergency rooms with a suspected suicide ideation. The largest group who are reporting in the ER are 10-19 year olds, followed by 20-29 year olds.

These people are the reason that I am here this afternoon and using OSPF's platform to strongly advocate for passage of this bill. I represent families of individuals lost to suicide and the conversations always go in the same direction – "what more could I have done?" and "what did I miss?" And I don't have any comforting responses to give those families. I also represent those who are fighting every day. My son is one of those people. I am in this position because of my own son's struggles. Personally, I watched my own son struggle for years and always convinced myself that the struggles that my son was having was just a part of teenage angst – those things like separating himself from family, struggling to stay connected to peer groups, sharing with me how he was struggling with school and sleeping a lot. I ignored those signs and, again, chalked those things up to "just being a teenager." However, in December of 2017, my son, now an adult, called me from a mental health facility saying that he had struggled with suicide and was now hospitalized because of it. He spent 13 days in a mental health facility before being released and we went through a tough few years where I didn't know if today was the day that I would get the call. I consider myself one of the lucky ones because after years of therapy and finally finding a medication regimen to



combat his issues, he is now a functioning and productive adult. He has a full time job with benefits, a girlfriend, pays his bills and looking at him, none of us would have any clue what he dealt with in his teens and early twenties. But, as I said, I am a parent who has my son, while so many families have not had the same second chances that I have.

OSPF supports HB 571, the Student-Safety Act because it gives young people a constant reminder that there is help available if they or a friend are experiencing a mental health crisis and helps promote 9-8-8 the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. In 2022, the National Suicide Crisis Lifeline 9-8-8 went live across Ohio, where we have 19 operating call centers.

In the first months of operations, 988 calls increased by 39% and texts increased by 603% and averaging 7,000-10,000 calls per month. Recent studies show that approximately 80% of calls can be handled via 9-8-8 without the person needing emergency services - this alleviates strain on 9-1-1, first responders and hospitals if callers are able to be stabilized by utilizing 9-8-8.

OSPF strongly supports and believes in 9-8-8 but also recognizes there is still work to be done to raise more awareness in the community about this life-saving resource. HB 571 is a piece of the puzzle to help drive education and awareness of 9-8-8 amongst youth in Ohio especially for those more vulnerable at-risk populations.

I am happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Thank you for your time.