



Feb. 14, 2022

House Committee on Health and Human Services
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Re: Support of HB 2281 establishing and implementing 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in Kansas

Chair and members of the committee:

On behalf of Health Forward Foundation (Health Forward), I submit this letter of testimony in support of the establishment of 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in Kansas. Health Forward encourages our legislature to ensure a Kansas 988 hotline that advances a coordinated response for all residents experiencing mental health crises.

The National Suicide Prevention Hotline Improvement Act, and the initiation of a national hotline, presents Kansas with an opportunity to enhance the existing community crisis response system. The opportunity of HB 2281 to address cost and capacity of the crisis care continuum is critical to ensuring a successful 988 implementation. Numerous studies show behavioral health crises, drug overdoses, and suicides were at epidemic proportion prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The strain of the pandemic on our health systems underscores the importance of a state supported 988 system to connect people to care without visiting an already inundated emergency department.

According to the SAMHSA Behavioral Health Barometer for Kansas, the percentage of adults 18 or older experiencing serious thoughts of suicide or serious mental illness (SMI) continues to increase. During 2017–2019, the annual average prevalence of SMI in Kansas was 6.1 percent, higher than the 4.8 percent national average. With an increase of deaths over the past five years, suicide is the ninth leading cause of death in Kansas. Mental Health America 2020 Access to Care data indicates that approximately 71 percent of Kansas youth with major depression episodes did not receive mental health treatment, further elevating the need for access to a suicide hotline to help youth in crisis.

Quality 988 crisis call centers can also play an important role in supporting access to safe, quality, mental health interventions for people of color and rural residents who are paid lower wages. Recent data indicates lower household incomes have been associated with poorer mental health throughout the pandemic (Kansas Health Institute). Reliance on 911 has resulted in tragic outcomes – especially for people of color experiencing mental health emergencies. Between 2015 and 2020, one in four people who were shot and killed by police had a mental illness; one in three were people of color.

A thoughtful 988 implementation plan will advance health equity in Kansas. 988 crisis lines provide a clear pathway to lifesaving care for all people, every time. A state supported 988 process will ensure that crisis mental health help is the same quality experience for people who live in rural areas or represent communities of color.



Please contact me at mbryantmacklin@healthforward.org if I can provide additional information on this issue.

Respectfully,

McClain Bryant Macklin

McClain Bryant Macklin

Director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives