

October 5, 2022

The Honorable David Trone  
1110 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brian Fitzpatrick  
271 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Trone and Representative Fitzpatrick:

Thank you for championing America's mental health. The undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) – a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and substance use treatment providers, advocates, and payers committed to strengthening access to mental health care and substance use treatment – write to voice our strong support for H.R.8391, the *CONtinuity in Necessary Evaluative Crisis Treatment (CONNECT) Act*. We are grateful for your ongoing commitment to improving crisis response services in the United States.

As you know, the *CONNECT Act* will authorize grant funding opportunities to help crisis centers provide follow-up treatment for individuals receiving suicide prevention and crisis intervention services. Eligible grant recipients will receive funding through the Department of Health and Human Services to help provide follow-up services, including check-ins to assess wellbeing and level of risk; outreach to ensure engagement in services and supports; collaboration with family, caregivers, and natural social supports; and referrals based on the individual's needed level of care.

According to CDC data, from August 2020 to February of 2021, over 4 in 10 adults reported experiencing anxiety or depression.<sup>i</sup> From 2009 to 2019, the number of high school students reporting feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased by 40%, the number of those seriously considering suicide increased by 36%, and the share of high school students creating a suicide plan increased by 44%.<sup>ii</sup> Nearly one in twenty American adults (4.9%) report having had serious thoughts of suicide in the last year.<sup>iii</sup> There is a dire need for a comprehensive crisis response system in the United States.

While the National Hotline Designation Act (Public Law 116-172) incorporated 988 as the three-digit number for suicide prevention and mental health crisis, its potential to transform the system of behavioral health crisis in this country can only be realized if we invest at all points across the crisis continuum of care. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), this vision for 988 must include providing follow up and follow through to engage individuals in crisis with local behavioral health services. We must ensure continuity of care following a crisis, so that individuals who are experiencing a mental health, substance use, or suicidal crisis are supported throughout their recoveries.

For many individuals experiencing a mental health crisis, these follow-up services can mean the difference between life and death. 988 represents a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build out the nation's behavioral health crisis care response system to one that can save lives and sufficiently address the needs of anyone, at any time, anywhere in the country. However, to achieve and sustain this goal, efficient and effective follow-up for those who seek crisis services is necessary. By helping to provide these follow-up services, the *CONNECT Act* will save lives and improve upon the 988 crisis care system.

We respectfully urge the swift passage of H.R.8391 and we look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues to improve America's crisis response systems.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

ACTNow for Mental Health (ANMH)

American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare

American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry (AAGP)

American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology

American Association on Health and Disability

American Counseling Association

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Mental Health Counselors Association

American Occupational Therapy Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association

American Public Health Association

Anxiety & Depression Association of America

Anxiety and depression association of America

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Clinical Social Work Association  
The College for Behavioral Health Leadership  
Crisis Text Line  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
Inseparable  
International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC)  
The International OCD Foundation  
International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses  
The Jed Foundation  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
The Kennedy Forum  
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance  
Mental Health America  
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of Counties  
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental  
Disability Directors  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD)  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)

National Council for Mental Wellbeing  
National Eating Disorders Association  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
National League for Nursing  
National Register of Health Service Psychologists  
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies  
Postpartum Support International  
REDC Consortium  
RI International  
Sandy Hook Promise  
Schizophrenia & Psychosis Action Alliance  
SMART Recovery  
Treatment Communities of America  
The Trevor Project  
Trust for America's Health

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<sup>i</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). *Symptoms of Anxiety or Depressive Disorder and Use of Mental Health Care Among Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, August 2020–February 2021*. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/pdfs/mm7013e2-H.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Office of the U.S. Surgeon General. (2021.) *Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory*. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021.) *2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health Annual National Report*.