

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. 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%. Nearly one in twenty American adults (4.9%) report having had serious thoughts of suicide in the last year. 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