

Kristen Bray

Overland Park, KS

Testimony in Support of H.B. 2281

Thank you, Chairperson and Committee Members for your diligent and important work.

My name is Kristen Bray, and I am a school counselor and Field Advocate for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, as well as a member of NAMI. I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak about my passionate support for HB2281, in favor of the Lifeline 988 number and the professional clinicians and mental health workers that will be necessary in order to properly implement this new resource, saving lives and reducing stigma. The direct, three-digit line to reach trained National Suicide Prevention Lifeline counselors when one is in the midst of a mental health crisis is crucial in order to prevent deaths by suicide. It is imperative that our state ensure that these calls will be responded to with trained professionals.

Having personal experience in having to call 9-1-1 when my adolescent daughter became suicidal, I was devastated when she had to be placed in handcuffs as though she were a criminal. Although I know it was for her own safety, I know that as a state and community, we can do better to treat those with mental illness with respect and reduce stigma by providing the services these individuals need, according to best practices and evidence-based research.

Dialing 988 instead of 911 ensures that the individuals responding know specifically how to respond to mental health crises. Having personal experience in having to call 9-1-1 when my adolescent daughter became suicidal, I was devastated when she had to be placed in handcuffs as though she were a criminal. Although I know it was for her own safety, I know that as a state and community, we can do better to treat those with mental illness with respect and reduce stigma by providing the services these individuals need, according to best practices and evidence-based research.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my experience to this Committee. My passion is fueled by grief of the preventable deaths of 7 young people, and my hope is that my desperate pleas have been met with compassion and understanding. It is difficult enough for individuals to reach out for help. I believe that 988 will encourage more people to ask for help earlier because it will take the fear out of the interaction. The community will know the response team will be specifically trained professionals. While the police force does their best to save lives and provide compassionate care, the current process can be very demeaning and traumatizing because the only options are handcuffs and the back of a patrol car, even though it is for safety. Individuals with mental health conditions should not be treated as criminals. While many law enforcement officers do have some training in regard to handling mental health crises, they are not clinical level providers, which is what one needs when in acute, severe crisis. Together, we can prevent suicides and reduce the stigma associated with getting mental health help.

As individuals, we choose to be part of a problem or part of a solution. I beg you to set aside party affiliations and hear with an open mind the crisis that is before us. We are losing too many people, too many children and adolescents. I beg you to provide resources and appropriately trained response teams for the upcoming 988 number. Thank you for taking the time to allow me to voice my concerns and thank you for your service.