

# U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Senators Baldwin, Collins introduce bipartisan legislation to strengthen 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Posted on Thursday, Sep 15, 2022

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced the bipartisan *988 Coordination and Improvement Act* to ensure that the three-digit National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline call centers have the resources to respond to calls and give Americans the specialized care they need. The bipartisan legislation comes amid a spike in use of the hotline that launched in July, [with a 45 percent increase](#) in calls in August 2022 compared to August 2021. The *988 Coordination and Improvement Act* would help coordinate the work of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) when it comes to providing behavioral health crisis care, promote access to specialized services for high-risk populations, and allow for appropriate oversight of the 988 Lifeline.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline was made possible by Senator Baldwin's *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act*, [bipartisan legislation](#) that [passed Congress](#) and went into effect nationwide this summer. The 988 Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in the United States. 988 has already allowed thousands of individuals of all ages who are experiencing a crisis—whether that is thoughts of suicide, a mental health concern or substance use issue, or any other kind of emotional distress—to get help for themselves or a loved one by connecting them with a trained crisis counselor.

“Mental health crises and suicide impact every community across the country and the 988 Lifeline is already showing promise in reaching more Americans who are

suffering,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “After working to get my bipartisan legislation signed into law and launched, this legislation will strengthen the 988 Lifeline and help ensure the call centers have the support needed to give people the timely care and services they want and need.”

“When Americans experiencing a mental health crisis and in need of emotional support reach out for help, it is vital that we make sure someone is there to listen, provide resources, and send assistance immediately if needed,” **said Senator Collins.** “The 988 Lifeline is an invaluable tool that has saved countless lives. By improving coordination, enhancing oversight, and expanding access to services for high-risk populations, our legislation would strengthen the hotline to ensure that more Americans can receive timely, effective assistance.”

“Senator Baldwin’s 988 Coordination and Improvement Act provides much needed access to resources that will strengthen state crisis care systems and support the implementation of best practices. The bill also aligns with Wisconsin’s efforts to ensure that people who are at higher risk for a behavioral health crisis can get crisis care when they need it most. I applaud Senator Baldwin for introducing this bill to help build crisis care and suicide prevention infrastructure for all states,” **said Wisconsin Department of Health Services Secretary Karen Timberlake.**

“In the face of a growing national mental health crisis, it is essential that the newly launched 988 lifeline is supported with the infrastructure and resources required to provide safe, accessible, and equitable care to serve those in need,” **said Preston Mitchum (he/him), Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs at The Trevor Project.** “The Trevor Project’s 2022 National Survey found that 45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year — yet 3 in 5 could not access the mental health care they desired. This bill will help enhance oversight and coordination of the 988 Lifeline while ensuring access to specialized services for high-risk populations, such as LGBTQ individuals. Thank you to Senator Baldwin for prioritizing the improvement of our nation’s crisis care system and for introducing this critical legislation.”

The *988 Coordination and Improvement Act* would:

- **Establish an office to coordinate work relating to behavioral health crisis care across the HHS:** The office, within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), will convene Federal, State,

Tribal, local and private partners, as well as launch and manage Federal workgroups charged with making recommendations regarding behavioral health crisis issues. Further, the coordinating office will assist States, local governmental entities, territories, Indian Tribes, and Tribal communities in developing crisis care systems and establishing nationwide best practices, with the goal of expanding capacity of and access to local 988 call centers, mobile crisis care, crisis stabilization, psychiatric emergency services, rapid post-crisis follow-up care, and essential community services. The office would be funded at \$10 million per year from FY23 through FY27.

- **Ensure that the 988 Lifeline supports access to specialized services for populations at higher risk of experiencing a behavioral health crisis, including members of the LGBTQ+ community and racial and ethnic minorities:** Efforts to support access to specialized services may include updates and development of training resources; adapting program network membership processes to incorporate organizations that provide specialized services for high-risk populations; designing and implementing transfer processes; and providing additional technical assistance to centers.
- **Provide additional transparency and oversight into the implementation of 988:** The Secretary of HHS will submit a report to Congress assessing the progress of HHS in implementation of 988, including an assessment of its performance, any efforts to provide specialized services to high-risk populations, state and regional variation access to crisis call centers, the capacity of the lifeline to handle texts and chats, any needed programmatic or technological advancements, and obstacles in collecting and distributing fees authorized by the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020.

The *988 Coordination and Improvement Act* is supported by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Children's Wisconsin, Wisconsin Department of Health Services, the Trevor Project, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Vibrant Emotional Health, Pathfinders Milwaukee, Black Space, and Office of Milwaukee County Executive.

A summary of the legislation is available [here](#).

Full text of the legislation is available [here](#).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).