**The 988 Coordination and Improvement Act**

Introduced by Senators Tammy Baldwin and Susan Collins

*A bipartisan bill to establish a Behavioral Health Crisis Coordinating Office, promote access to specialized services for high-risk populations, and ensure appropriate oversight of 988*

**Background:** On July 16, 2022, the new calling code for the National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, 988, was launched. The 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. The 988 Lifeline was made possible by Senator Tammy Baldwin’s *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act*, [**bipartisan legislation**](https://www.baldwin.senate.gov/news/press-releases/three-digit-suicide-prevention-hotline-legislation) that [**passed Congress**](https://www.baldwin.senate.gov/news/press-releases/988-bill-passes-house) and became law in 2020.

**Now that 988 has officially launched, there is more that we must do to ensure that crisis call centers have the resources to respond to calls and to make sure that Americans have access to the services they need.**

**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 988. Specifically, the bill would:

* **Establish, within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an office to coordinate work relating to behavioral health crisis care across the operating divisions and agencies of HHS:** The office 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 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline supports access to specialized services for populations at higher risk of experiencing a behavioral health crisis, including members of the LGBTQ+ community, American Indian and Alaska Natives, individuals who reside in rural counties, veterans, 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 (P.L. 116-172).

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