

Submitter: Jim Pittenger

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2757

I am a retired Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist after working 42 years on the central Oregon Coast. I strongly support expansion of the 988 mental health and suicide crisis response program with HB2757. Often victims of suicide and other forms of violence arrived at my office decimated by their experiences, trying to make sense of the tragedy that had befallen them and their loved ones. In almost every case, they had seen signs beforehand but were unable to marshal the help needed to head off disaster. Many did not call 911 because it felt like a violation of confidence and would damage further the individual who was already having difficulty coping. The Law was not perceived as helpful. Others, the majority, did call 911, but the police had little to offer. It was common for clients to report that the Officers told them the matter was not criminal enough or dangerous enough and lay outside their scope of service. After several such responses, family and friends gave up and prayed and tried to help as best they could, sick at heart and in fear for what they could foresee happening. Rarely, but sometimes, clients would come seeking help before committing self destructive and other destructive acts, and we were able to secure help for them within the health system and prevent catastrophe.

From this history it is obvious that there is a missing link in our community safety net. We need a means to seek help without fear of the law and without fear of being disregarded. We need to provide easy and effective access to the health care system. The epidemic of violence affects each one of us and also our statewide community. We can most effectively manage the risk of violence with a comprehensive and effective mental health safety net. The missing piece in this safety net at present- and the single most powerful tool in terms of cost effectiveness- is the dedicated 988 line which HB2757 is designed to expand.

Thank you