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Assemblymember, District 16

AB 988 – The Miles Hall Lifeline Act: 988 Suicide and Mental Health Crisis Hotline

Summary

AB 988 creates a new three-digit phone line, 988, for suicide prevention and immediate, localized emergency response for individuals in mental health crisis by trained mental health professionals.

Problem

California is facing a mental health crisis. One in 6 Californians now live with a mental illness and suicides have been steadily climbing, increasing by 35% nationally over the last two decades. This tragic trend has only been exacerbated by COVID-19.

For decades, California has failed to provide necessary mental health services amidst this growing mental health crisis. As a result, the police and the criminal justice system as whole often serve the state's default mental health provider. Currently, 10% of law enforcement agencies' budgets – and 20% of staff time – are spent responding to individuals with mental illness.

As a direct consequence of our overreliance on law enforcement responses to a public health crisis, ~25% of all individuals killed in police-involved shootings since 2015 had a known mental illness, with black men dying disproportionately.

In 2019, Miles Hall, a 23-year-old black man living in Walnut Creek, was in the midst of a schizophrenic mental health crisis when his family called 911 for help. Despite being familiar with Miles' condition, the officers resorted to lethal force within a minute of their arrival.

Law enforcement officers are not mental health experts and should not be expected to serve this role. A better system for Miles and all Californians is possible – one that leads with treatment, not law enforcement.

Background

In October of 2020, the federal government passed, and the President signed new legislation, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act, establishing a new phone line (988) for suicide prevention and immediate mental health crisis response nationwide. Before July 2022, when 988 goes live, states must create a framework to receive and respond to calls.

What this bill does

AB 988 implements the national 988 system in California so that all people experiencing a mental health crisis are able to receive life-saving care.

This bill will designate crisis hotline centers to provide intervention 24/7 through call, chat, and text. These call centers will be able to deploy crisis services – such as mobile crisis teams and crisis stabilization services. To ensure long-term success, centers will also follow up with callers to ensure they receive ongoing care.

The crisis hotline centers will also work with the National Suicide Hotline to provide over the phone immediate support for individuals calling in with suicidal thoughts.

Additionally, AB 988 will establish a monthly fee on mobile phone and landline bills – similar to a fee charged for 911 – to fund the 988 system.

Support

County of Contra Costa (Sponsor)
County of Los Angeles (Sponsor)
Kennedy Forum (Sponsor)
Miles Hall Foundation (Sponsor)
NAMI Contra Costa (Sponsor)
Steinberg Institute (Sponsor)
Autism Deserves Equal Coverage
City of Concord
City of San Pablo City Council

City of Walnut Creek
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance California
Jewish Child and Family Services
Mental Health America of California
NAMI Greater Los Angeles County
Re:Store Justice
Shatterproof
The Trevor Project
Well Being Trust
Women's March Contra Costa

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