



## Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

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### Memorandum in Support

S.6194-B (Brouk)/A.7177-B (Gunther)

*AN ACT* to amend the county law, in relation to a 9-8-8 suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system

The Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) supports S.6194-B (Brouk)/A.7177-B (Gunther), which would establish a three-digit, 9-8-8 suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system.

The National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018 set the stage for the three-digit hotline number. Pursuant to the Act, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recommended a 3-digit dialing code to be used for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system. Currently, individuals in crisis are able to call 1-800-273-8255 to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Soon, it will be much easier to remember how to reach the Lifeline as the number will be changing to "988" nationwide by July 2022. SAMHSA reported that empirical evidence has shown good results regarding effectiveness of the Lifeline, including a reduction of suicidal ideation and hopelessness, improved suicide risk assessment, response to callers at imminent risk, and improving follow up. This legislation anticipates these changes and positions New York to take full advantage of this national systems change.

New York is fortunate to have one of the lowest suicide rates of any state in the nation. But, as a 2018 Office of Mental Health report rightfully stated – 1,700 deaths per year due to suicide is too many. And, although New York's suicide rate is comparatively low, the number of suicides has risen 40% since 2000. Clearly, more can be done and this legislation represents a critical step.

This legislation will connect more people with services. While a mental health crisis is not an ideal circumstance for accessing care, the provisions of this legislation will result in more people getting help. This is critical because it is well-established that people under-access mental health services. Only about 40 percent of people with diagnosable mental illness will get the help they need and there is a 10-year average latency period from symptom onset to reaching out for help.

Finally, and importantly, S.6194-B/A.7177-B tasks OMH and the Office of Addiction Supports and Services (as well as the Department of Public Service) to jointly administer and report on the three-digit hotline number and the mental health crisis hotline system because of the high level of comorbidity of mental illness and substance use.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, and primarily because this legislation will save lives, MHANYS urges the Legislature to pass S.6194-B/A.7177-B.

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