

Suicide Prevention – 988 & Lethal Means Safety

Support A 4108: 988 Monthly Surcharge on Phone Bills. [Cunningham] would establish a monthly 988 telecom fee capped at 35 cents (a maximum of \$4.20 per year) on phone bills, and a 988 suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis hotline trust fund, where said revenue would be deposited. Monies in the fund would pay for costs associated with the operation and maintenance of the 988 crisis response system and support the crisis intervention and follow-up services provided to individuals accessing 988.

- In 2023, suicide was the 4th leading cause of death among New Yorkers ages 10-65, and it was the 14th leading cause of death overall. That year, we lost 1,717 residents to suicide.¹
- The [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) connects individuals in need of support during a suicide, mental health, or substance use crisis (or those worried about someone else) to a national network of state and local crisis centers that provide around-the-clock crisis care. There are also national text and chat services available (text 988 or chat at chat.988lifeline.org).
- Demand for 988 services has steadily increased since 988 launched nationwide in July 2022.
 - The number of monthly calls routed to 988 in New York in January 2026 (most recent data available) is 186% higher than the number of calls routed in July 2022 (48,482 calls vs. 16,973 calls, respectively).²
 - In 2025, the average number of monthly calls was 42,425.viii
 - Since the July 2022 launch, NY 988 has answered over 1.1 million calls, over 230,000 texts, and chats.³
- Permanent, sustainable funding is needed for New York’s crisis services continuum to continue to meet growing community crisis needs and to truly provide all residents with:
 - Someone to contact (New York’s fourteen 988 crisis contact centers)
 - Someone to respond (mobile crisis response teams)
 - Somewhere safe to go (crisis receiving and stabilization centers).⁴
- [Twelve](#) states have enacted a similar monthly 988 telecom fee, including Vermont, Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware. In Maryland, 4 out of 5 (79%) registered voters agreed they would be willing to pay an extra 25 cents a month on their phone bill for 988, demonstrating broad public support for the fee.⁵

- Continued state appropriations will be needed until a sustainable revenue source, like a 988 telecom fee is put in place. Funds appropriated for 988 over the last few years (most recently, \$60M for the 2025-2026 state fiscal year) have been critical to ensuring early success of 988 in New York. These investments must continue to meet the growing service demand.
- A well-resourced 988 system will reduce reliance on law enforcement in behavioral health crisis response, reduce hospitalizations and legal interventions, save money for the state, and improve outcomes for individuals in crisis.

Suicide Deterrent Bridge Barriers. Since 2007, over 100 people have died by suicide, and more than 40 people have attempted suicide on 5 bridges under the jurisdiction of the New York State Bridge Authority (NYSBA).⁶ This includes the Bear Mountain, Newburgh-Beacon, Mid-Hudson, Kingston-Rhinecliff, and Rip Van Winkle bridges. AFSP calls on the NYS legislature and the NYSBA to work together to address this preventable loss of life.

- Immediate Needs: We commend the NYSBA for recently agreeing to install an important deterrent barrier.⁷ However, this process will take years, and there is a need for a temporary barrier solution to protect against suicide attempts in the meantime. And there are still 4 other NYSBA bridges that have no plans for deterrent barriers that need to be addressed.
 - The Natchez Trace Bridge in Tennessee installed a temporary chain link fence in 2022 to save lives while the National Park Service worked on a permanent barrier. As of October 2024, the temporary barrier had been up for 2 years with no suicide fatalities.⁸
- Legislative Solutions: Please support the following bills this session:
 - S 3053 [Harckham]/A 4821 [Kay] would require the installation of climb deterrent fencing on all bridges under the jurisdiction of the NYSBA.
 - A 2656 [Sayegh] would create a bridge suicide barrier fund, to be used to study how to include a suicide deterrent barrier in the construction of new bridges or include barriers in replacements of bridges with a history of suicide attempts.

Reducing access to lethal means, such as bridges, is a proven, research-supported component of suicide prevention.⁹ Barriers give suicidal individuals, and those who care for them, time: time for the suicidal impulse to pass, time for someone to intervene, and time to seek help. In comparing all potential interventions to prevent suicides at bridges, including signs and telephone hotlines, research has shown that barriers that physically restrict access are the most effective.¹⁰ A summary report found a 91% reduction in suicide at publicly accessible areas of height where barriers were installed.¹¹

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References

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