

# **A Lifeline for New Jersey is at Risk. Our Lawmakers Must Act**

By Mark T. Williams, BSN, RN-BC



In our busy lives, it's easy to miss a quiet crisis. But here in New Jersey, a vital lifeline is answering the call. In just the past year, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline has responded to over 130,000 cries for help from our neighbors. It's crucial to remember that behind each call, text, or chat is a person in pain—a parent worried about their child, a veteran struggling with trauma, or a neighbor on the edge of despair.

This system is more than a number; it's the gateway to a smarter, more compassionate response to mental health crises. Our state is building real solutions, including Mobile Crisis Outreach Response Teams that can de-escalate situations in the community and new Crisis Receiving and Stabilization Centers that provide a safe place to turn when the worst happens.

But this progress is fragile. Without stable funding, this entire system is at risk as federal start-up dollars run out. We cannot build a lifeline only to let it fray.

That's why it is critical for our lawmakers to pass S4502 / A5972. This common-sense legislation would establish a modest 40-cent monthly phone fee, mirroring the existing 911 fee we all pay for emergency services. This small, predictable investment would raise \$61 million annually to ensure the 988 crisis system remains strong, responsive, and there for every one of us in our moment of need.

Just as we reliably fund 911 for physical emergencies, we must do the same for 988 for mental health emergencies. I urge our legislators to pass this bill and ensure that when a neighbor calls for help, someone is always there to answer. For updates or to contact your representatives, you can use the New Jersey Legislature's Find Your Legislator tool or track the bill progress on the [Official New Jersey Legislature website](#).