

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2408

As Reported by House Committee On:
Health Care & Wellness

Title: An act relating to methods of communication used by the technology platform designed for the behavioral health crisis response and suicide prevention system.

Brief Description: Concerning methods of communication used by the technology platform designed for the behavioral health crisis response and suicide prevention system.

Sponsors: Representatives Lekanoff, Orwall, Davis, Ramel and Nance.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care & Wellness: 1/23/24, 1/26/24 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires any Washington state subnetwork of the 988 crisis hotline dedicated to the crisis assistance needs of American Indian and Alaska Native persons to offer services by text, chat, and other similar methods of communication to the same extent as the general 988 crisis hotline, subject to approval by the national 988 administrator and appropriated funds.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Riccelli, Chair; Bateman, Vice Chair; Schmick, Ranking Minority Member; Hutchins, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bronoske, Caldier, Davis, Graham, Harris, Macri, Maycumber, Mosbrucker, Orwall, Stonier, Thai and Tharinger.

Staff: Kim Weidenaar (786-7120).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

In 2021 House Bill 1477 was enacted which established several changes to the behavioral health crisis system in response to the adoption of 988 as the phone number for the National Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Hotline. The bill established crisis call center hubs (subsequently renamed to designated 988 contact hubs) and further defined as a contact center that streamlines clinical interventions and access to resources for people experiencing a behavioral health crisis to provide crisis intervention services, case management, referrals, and connection to crisis system participants. In 2021 the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) announced that Vibrant Emotional Health will be the administrator for the 988 crisis hotline.

Washington's Native and Strong Lifeline is a program operated through the Volunteers of America Western Washington, one of the state's three 988 crisis centers that is dedicated to serving American Indian and Alaska Native people. The Native and Strong Lifeline is integrated into the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline system. When someone calls the 988 Lifeline from a Washington state area code, they will hear an automated greeting that features different options, callers can then choose option 4 to be connected to the Native and Strong Lifeline. Calls to the Native and Strong Lifeline are answered by Native crisis counselors, who are fully trained in crisis intervention and support, with special emphasis on cultural and traditional practices related to healing.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Subject to authorization by the national 988 administrator and the availability of funds appropriated for this specific purpose, any Washington subnetwork of the 988 crisis hotline dedicated to the crisis assistance needs of American Indian and Alaska Native persons must offer services by text, chat, and other similar methods of communication to the same extent as the general 988 crisis hotline. The Department of Health must coordinate with the SAMHSA for the authorization.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill:

- requires that the capacity for text, chat, and other similar communication methods be part of any subnetwork of the 988 crisis hotline dedicated to the crisis assistance needs of American Indian and Alaska Native persons to the same extent as the 988 crisis hotline, subject to authorization by the national 988 administrator and the availability of funds;
- removes the provision that requires the crisis call center platform to be capable of allowing these methods of communication for any line dedicated to the needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives; and
- requires the Department of Health to coordinate with the SAMHSA for the

authorization.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Native Americans have the highest rate of suicide throughout the nation. Fifteen years ago, if two good friends could have picked up the phone and asked for help, they both might still be here today. This bill is very important. This bill is fixing a minor technical glitch and will allow Native Americans and Alaska Natives to have access to a lot of the communication tools in the 988 system.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Debra Lekanoff, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.