

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES PROPOSED TRAILER BILL LANGUAGE

988 Call Center Oversight

FACT SHEET

Summary: The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) proposes to establish a process and standard criteria for entities to apply for approval as designated 988 centers; quality standards designated 988 centers must meet to maintain designation; and comprehensive oversight and monitoring of designated 988 centers.

Background: The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 (NSHD) designated 988 as the three-digit number for the national Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. To fund the 988 system adequately and sustainably, NSHD authorized states to impose a fee on access lines for providing 988-related services. Revenue from the fee must be held in a designated account to be spent only in support of 988 services, and the Federal Communications Commission must submit an annual report on state administration of these fees.

California implemented the 988 Lifeline via the Miles Hall Lifeline and Suicide Prevention Act (Assembly Bill (AB) 988 (Chapter 747, Statutes of 2022)) in 2022. AB 988 created the 988 State Suicide and Behavioral Health Crisis Services Fund and requires the fees to be deposited along with other specified moneys into the fund. The revenue generated by the 988 surcharge shall be prioritized to fund: (1) the 988 centers, including the efficient and effective routing of telephone calls, personnel, and the provision of acute behavioral health services through telephone call, text, and chat to the 988 number; and (2) the operation of mobile crisis teams accessed via telephone calls, texts, or chats made to or routed through 988. Any entity seeking moneys available through the fund must file an annual expenditure and outcomes report containing specified information.

AB 988 required the California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS) to establish the 988-Crisis Policy Advisory Group (PAG), to advise CalHHS on the development of recommendations to support a five-year implementation plan for building a comprehensive 988 system. The AB 988 Five-Year Plan (the Plan) was submitted to the Legislature in January 2025. The Plan identifies opportunities to advance the State's vision of an equitable, accessible, high-quality 988 crisis system. To support California's goal of establishing a high-quality 988 system, the Plan also includes recommendations



to guide state action and corresponding implementation activities for state agencies and departments to operationalize to meet the overarching goals.

The Plan includes a recommendation for DHCS to strengthen the ability of 988 centers to serve Californians in crisis by building on national standards and best practices and establishing state-specific standards and training to better equip 988 centers to respond to 988 contacts. Additionally, it recommends DHCS develop a process to designate and re-designate California's 988 centers. There are currently eleven entities operating as 988 centers in California. However, these centers are not operating under a standardized framework and DHCS lacks the statutory authority to adequately oversee and regulate these entities.

To improve service quality, promote consistent access, and enhance coordination among participants, DHCS is proposing a designation process for all new and existing 988 centers so that all centers operate under the same standardized framework and comply with uniform quality-control criteria. Furthermore, DHCS is proposing specific oversight and monitoring activities for compliance with the statewide standards and increased accountability of the publicly funded designated 988 centers.

Justification for the Change: DHCS proposes to establish a process and standard criteria for entities to apply for approval as designated 988 centers. Additionally, DHCS proposes language to provide authority for DHCS to establish standards to oversee and govern the performance of designated 988 centers, including staffing requirements, training requirements, clinical and triage protocols for behavioral health services, measures to assess the quality of 988 services, and performance requirements. Without explicit statutory authority, DHCS cannot adequately designate, fund, or oversee designated 988 centers, align with national standards and best practices for ensuring trauma-informed, person-centered, and culturally responsive care, and achieve the goals set forth by the 988 PAG.

The Trailer Bill Language (TBL) also provides DHCS with the authority to oversee the funding of 988 centers, designated 988 centers, and mobile crisis teams for staffing necessary to provide 988 and mobile crisis services. Furthermore, the TBL would require the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), in consultation with DHCS, to allocate and distribute funds to 988 centers and designated 988 centers for the acquisition of technology and equipment as appropriated by the Legislature.

Specifically, the trailer bill language would:

- Define a “designated 988 center” to mean a center that has applied for and obtained approval from DHCS to operate a designated 988 center on a county or



regional basis in California, participate in the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network to respond to statewide or regional 988 calls, and receive funding from the 988 Suicide and Behavioral Health Crisis Services Fund (proposed GOV Section 53123.1.5(c)).

- Add “designated 988 centers” to the non-exhaustive list of entities providing crisis intervention services in the definition of behavioral health crisis services (GOV Section 53123.1.5(e)).
- Define “mobile crisis team” to mean a multidisciplinary behavioral health provider team that meets the standards and requirements to provide community-based mobile crisis response services under the Medi-Cal program and other requirements as set forth by DHCS (GOV Section 53123.1.5(i)).
- Strike the soon-to-be-obsolete reference to the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) that defines mobile crisis teams (GOV Section 53123.4(b)(1)).
- Clarify that the revenue generated by the 988 surcharge may be used for state operations expenditures, including personnel and other related administrative costs (GOV Section 53123.4(b)(1)).
- Clarify that Cal OES must make available the funds deposited into the 988 State Suicide and Behavioral Health Crisis Services Fund to support the operation of the 988 system and mobile crisis teams (GOV Section 53123.4(d)) as appropriated by the Legislature.
- Specify that Cal OES must provide DHCS with sufficient funds to ensure the operation of the 988 centers, designated 988 centers, and mobile crisis teams (GOV Section 53123.4(d)(1)) as appropriated by the Legislature.
- Specify that DHCS must allocate and distribute the funds for the purposes of staffing and other costs as specified by DHCS (GOV Section 53123.4(d)(2)).
- Specify that Cal OES, in consultation with DHCS, must allocate and distribute funds to the 988 centers and designated 988 centers for the acquisition of technology and equipment (GOV Section 53123.4 (d)(3)).
- Require DHCS to establish a framework for entities to apply for 988 center designation no sooner than October 1, 2027 (GOV Section 53123.7(a)).
- Require existing 988 centers to obtain approval as a designated 988 center from DHCS by December 31, 2029 (GOV Section 53123.7(b)).
- Clarify that a 988 center may receive funds through the 988 Suicide and Behavioral Health Crisis Services Fund until December 31, 2029, and on January 1, 2030, and ongoing, only a designated 988 center may receive funds (GOV Section 53123.7(c)).
- Require DHCS to establish standards no sooner than October 1, 2027, to ensure designated 988 centers provide quality services. (GOV Section 53123.7(d)).

- Require DHCS to establish standards for the oversight and monitoring of designated 988 centers no sooner than October 1, 2027 (GOV Section 53123.7(e)).
- Require a designated 988 center to furnish all information, records, and documentation requested by DHCS to review compliance within 15 calendar days from the day of the request unless DHCS grants the center an extension (GOV Section 53123.7(f)).
- Authorize DHCS to conduct performance and compliance audits of designated 988 centers (GOV Section 53123.7(g)).
- Allow DHCS to require a designated 988 center to take specified actions to correct any noncompliance with state law or DHCS guidance (GOV Section 53123.7(h)).
- Authorize DHCS to suspend or revoke any designation issued to operate a 988 center or deny an application for designation (GOV Section 53123.7(i)).
- Clarify that a designated 988 center that has had its designation revoked or suspended cannot receive funds through the 988 Suicide and Behavioral Health Crisis Services Fund or operate a designated 988 center unless its designation is reinstated, or in the case of revocation, it applies for and receives approval for a new designation (GOV Section 53123.7(j)).
- Require DHCS to post on its website a list of all 988 centers, along with any corrective action plans, suspensions, or revocations imposed beginning on January 1, 2028 (GOV Section 53123.7(k)).

Summary of Arguments in Support:

- Establishes clear authority for DHCS to work with Cal OES on ensuring there are sufficient funds for the operations of the 988 system and mobile crisis teams.
- Ensures sufficient funds are made available for the operation of the 988 centers, designated 988 centers, and mobile crisis teams.
- Ensures that the 988 centers and designated 988 centers are provided with funds for the acquisition of technology and equipment to support the technical operations of the centers.
- Aligns statute with several recommendations included in the five-year implementation plan for a comprehensive 988 crisis system.
- Establishes a statewide framework for designating 988 centers and allows the State to regulate and monitor designated 988 centers.
- Increases accountability and compliance of publicly funded designated 988 centers by imposing statewide standards and establishing comprehensive State oversight.