



**California
Behavioral Health
Planning Council**

ADVOCACY • EVALUATION • INCLUSION

CHAIRPERSON
Tony Vartan

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Jenny Bayardo

February 26, 2026

The Honorable Mia Bonta, Chair

Assembly Health Committee

1020 N Street, Suite 390

Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for AB 1540 – 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: LGBTQ+ youth.

Dear Assemblymember Bonta:

On behalf of the California Behavioral Health Planning Council (CBHPC), I am writing to express our support for Assembly Bill (AB) 1540 (González).

The CBHPC serves as an advisory body to the Legislature and the Administration on behavioral health policies and priorities, as outlined in Welfare and Institutions Code §§ 5771 and 5772. Our diverse membership includes individuals with lived experience of serious mental illness and substance use disorders, family members, parents of children with serious emotional idsturbances, service providers, professionals, and representatives from state departments whose work intersects with California’s behavioral health system. Their perspectives are essential to our evaluation of the public behavioral health system and shape the Council’s recommendations.

AB 1540 would restore the distinct crisis hotline for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, plus (LGBTQ+) Youth in California by requiring the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to ensure technology allows for automatic routing.

During the 10-month pilot phase and subsequent two-year implementation of the nationally dedicated crisis line to support LGBTQ+ youth and young people by the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline—formerly the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline—nearly 1.6 million calls were made. Service utilization demonstrated consistent growth, with the crisis line averaging

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69,000 monthly calls during the final full months of service (March 2025 to June 2025) prior to its mid-July sunset.¹

LGBTQ+ youth remain disproportionately at risk for mental health challenges, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts. They are twice as likely to report experiencing persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness compared to their heterosexual peers. In addition, high school students who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual are more than four times as likely to have attempted suicide.² Yet accessing behavioral health services and support can be challenging for this population who encounter significant barriers, including fear of discrimination by providers, invalidation through misgendering, and the perceived burden of having to educate providers about their identity and/or sexuality.

A study analyzing experiences with the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline found that 88 percent of surveyed callers reported that contacting the line prevented them from moving forward with suicide. Callers' perceptions of their counselors' behaviors were significantly and meaningfully associated with positive call outcomes³, highlighting the critical importance of counselors who are not only well-trained, but also deeply knowledgeable and affirming to foster safety and hope for LGBTQ+ youth in crisis.

California has the largest LGBTQ+ population in the United States with an estimated 11 percent of the State's youth identifying as part of this community. It is crucial that California continues to invest in accessible, life-saving services to ensure that they are able to access affirming support to navigate critical and vulnerable situations.

For these reasons, the Council proudly supports AB 1540. If you have any questions, please contact Jenny Bayardo, Executive Officer, at (916) 750-3778 or via e-mail at Jenny.Bayardo@cbhpc.dhcs.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (n.d.). *988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline performance metrics*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/988/performance-metrics>

² National Alliance on Mental Illness. (n.d.). LGBTQ+. NAMI. <https://www.nami.org/community-and-culture/lgbtq/>

³ American Psychiatric Association. (2025). Majority of Callers Say 988 Saved Their Lives. *Psychiatric News*, 60(8), 12. <https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2025.08.8.12>



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Chairperson

cc: The Honorable Assemblymember Mark González
Vincent Huynh, Lead Policy Advisor
Kyle Johnson, Legislative Aide
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
Equality California
Sacramento LGBTQ+ Center