



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #446

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Grants (Health Services -- Behavioral Health)

[LFB 2023-25 Budget Summary: Page 282, #2]

CURRENT LAW

The Department of Health Services (DHS) contracts with Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin to operate the state's 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, which accepts calls, texts, and chats from Wisconsin residents who are experiencing crisis or are having suicidal thoughts. The Lifeline operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is staffed by mental health professionals and trained volunteers to help callers manage crisis episodes and connect them with local, follow-up services as needed. Wisconsin's 988 Lifeline is a member organization of the National 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The national Lifeline provides the infrastructure for local and state suicide lifelines, establishes standards and training resources, and serves as a backup service if member organizations are unable to take a call. Callers to 988 who identify themselves as a veteran are routed to a suicide line operated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Prior to the creation of the statewide 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in July of 2020, there were four county-supported suicide prevention call lines operating in Wisconsin: the North Central Health Care line, serving Marathon, Lincoln, and Langlade counties, the Acute Care Services line, serving Washington and Ozaukee counties, the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division's line, and the Journey Mental Health Center line, serving Dane County. Wisconsin residents outside these geographic areas were able to utilize the national suicide prevention service, which also was the backup service for the regional lines.

2. Most calls originating from a county served by one of the county-supported suicide prevention services were handled by the local service. However, because much of the state did not have a local suicide prevention line, only 30% of calls from Wisconsin residents were handled locally,

with the remaining 70% routed to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (now known as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline), a service funded by the federal government. While the national lifeline can serve as an important backup to local services during periods of high call volume, the use of an in-state service is considered to be a better option since an in-state service is typically better able to quickly connect callers with follow-up, supportive services in the person's community.

3. DHS contracted with Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin for the statewide suicide prevention line beginning in July of 2020. Once the state established the statewide line, the percentage of calls that were taken by an in-state service increased from 30% to 87% during the first several months of operation. With the establishment of the statewide line, the four county-based lines ceased operations.

4. In 2020, Congress enacted the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act (NSHD), which directed the Federal Communications Commission to designate 988 as the three-digit number for the suicide lifeline, replacing the 10-digit toll free number that had been used. The 988 service was initiated in July of 2022.

5. With the start of the 988 dialing option, and with the phasing out of the local call centers, the call volume at the Wisconsin Lifeline has increased, as was expected. For the period of July to December of 2022, the total number of calls increased by 70% over the same six-month period in 2021, from 20,874 to 35,513. With this increase in volume, the percentage that were answered by the Wisconsin 988 Lifeline decreased from 89% in the six-month period in 2021 to 77% in the corresponding period in 2022. The in-state answer rate has remained in the 76% to 80% range during the first four months of 2023.

6. Since being established, the Department has supported the Wisconsin suicide prevention line primarily with an annual allocation of \$2,000,000 from the state's federal community mental health services block grant, but has supplemented this amount with other federal grants to support expansion of services as the call volume has increased. This includes an allocation a portion of federal block grant supplements received under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 and the American Rescue Plan Act, and \$1.8 million in federal grants specifically targeted to 988 Lifeline services under the NSHD and the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022.

7. While the NSHD and the BSCA provided funding to states to implement and expand local and state 988 Lifeline services, it has generally been expected that supporting ongoing operations costs of these call centers would be a state responsibility. To help support these costs, the NSHD authorized states to establish a 988 telecommunications fee, similar to what is authorized for 911 funding. To date, five states have established a 988 fee, but most others are using some combination of federal grants and general fund appropriations to support the call centers.

8. AB 43/SB 70 would provide \$898,700 GPR in 2023-24 and \$2,105,700 GPR in 2024-25 to supplement the federal funding available for the state's 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. These funding amounts are based on an estimate of the total cost of the Lifeline and the amount of federal funding that the Department projected would remain available for supporting the service.

9. To estimate the cost of the service, DHS projected the number of calls that the Wisconsin

Lifeline would take in each year of the 2023-25 biennium and multiplied that by an estimate of the average cost per call. For call volume, the Department projected the number of calls in 2022-23 (in-state response only) based on the daily call volume in July and August of 2022, and assumed that the volume would increase by 7% annually from that level in 2023-24 and in 2024-25. To estimate the cost, the Department divided the total grant to Family Services in Northeast Wisconsin in 2020 (\$2,000,000) by number of calls answered in that year, which produces an estimate of \$83.26 per call.

10. The following table shows the estimated call volume and total estimate cost under the Department's estimate. The table also shows the amount of federal funding that the Department assumed would remain available for 988 services in the biennium, and the proposed GPR funding to cover the difference between the total cost and the available federal funding. Of the federal funding available, \$2.0 million annually is the ongoing block grant allocation and \$1,873,000 in 2023-24 and \$1,000,000 in 2024-25 is the amount remaining from a combination of block grant supplements and 988 implementation grants.

	<u>2023-24</u>	<u>2024-25</u>
Estimated Calls Answered	57,311	61,322
Total Cost Estimate at \$83 per Call	\$4,771,700	\$5,105,700
Existing Funding		
Federal Block Grant Allocation	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000
Other Federal Grants	<u>1,873,000</u>	<u>1,000,000</u>
Total Existing Funding	\$3,873,000	\$3,000,000
Remaining Cost (Proposed GPR)	\$898,700	\$2,105,700

11. Since the time that the Department developed these estimates, more recent data has become available on calls and the Lifeline's costs, which can be used to update these estimates. Call volume is on pace to be slightly higher than the Department had projected for 2022-23, but not by a margin that would significantly alter the budget estimates. However, the cost per call estimate could be revised. Under the 988 contract, Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin is reimbursed for actual eligible expenses, up to the maximum grant award. Based on the most recent expense invoices and call volume data, the vendor's average cost per call answered is approximately \$50. Although it is possible that the vendor's costs will increase as the capacity to take calls is expanded, this data suggests that the annual cost for the current level of service would range between \$2.9 million and \$3.1 million during the biennium.

12. In addition to using a revised cost estimate, the amount of state funds needed for the service, if any, could be affected by additional federal assistance that has now been made available for state and local 988 service. Congress included funding for 988 and related crisis services in the Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2023, which the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will distribute over a three-year period. Under the distribution formula used for this funding, Wisconsin could be eligible for a maximum grant of \$4,505,100 per year.

13. According to SAMSHA's grant announcement for the additional federal 988 funding, the funding is generally intended to be used to improve existing 988 services and meet growing demands for the service. To that end, SAMSHA indicates that, among other purposes, funding can be used for the following: (a) to enhance recruitment, hiring, and training of Lifeline personnel in order to achieve a 90% in-state call rate; (b) implement technology and security measures to fully support 988 infrastructure and coordination with other crisis services; and (c) improve 988 support for high risk and underserved populations. In applying for the funds, states will be required to collect and analyze call data, as well as implement various strategies to improve integration with other crisis response systems. Although the funding can generally be used to make improvements to the 988 service itself, some broader improvements to state and local crisis response systems are also eligible expenses. For instance, SAMHSA indicates that funding can be used to support integrated peer services (people with lived experience with mental health disorders) in the crisis centers.

14. With the reestimate of the total cost of the 988 service and the receipt of additional federal funding to support 988 operations, it is possible that no state funding would be needed to support the existing 988 service during the 2023-25 biennium. Nevertheless, the Committee could determine that establishing a source of state funding for 988 service can help ensure that the Lifeline has sufficient capacity to meet increasing demand and to make improvements to other aspects of the service, such as increasing the in-state answer rate, conducting outreach to underserved areas and populations, enhancing follow-up communication with callers, and improving integration with local crisis resources. Any additional federal funding that the state has available can be used to supplement current efforts, to the extent those expenses would be eligible. In this event, the Committee could provide the same amount of state funding that AB 43/SB 70, as introduced, would provide. [Alternative 1]

15. The Committee could also decide to establish some ongoing state funding for 988 services, but at a lower level than AB 43/SB 70. For instance, the Committee could provide \$500,000 GPR annually for 988 services. [Alternative 2]

16. The Committee could also determine that there will be sufficient federal funding available to support 988 services at least during the 2023-25 biennium. In this case, no state funding would be needed. [Alternative 3]

ALTERNATIVES

1. Provide \$898,700 GPR in 2023-24 and \$2,105,700 GPR in 2024-25 in a new appropriation for suicide and crisis lifeline grants to support the state's 988 suicide and crisis lifeline.

ALT 1	Change to Base
GPR	\$3,004,400

2. Provide \$500,000 GPR annually in a new appropriation for suicide and crisis lifeline grants to support the state's 988 suicide and crisis lifeline.

ALT 2	Change to Base
GPR	\$1,000,000

3. Take no action.

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