

Date of Hearing: April 15, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND CONVEYANCE

Tasha Boerner, Chair

AB 1540 (Mark González) – As Amended March 19, 2026

SUBJECT: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: LGBTQ+ youth

SUMMARY: This bill would require the Office of Emergency Services (OES) to request the federal government authorize a function to allow California callers to dial 988 and press “3” to be automatically routed to a specialized call center specializing in LGBTQ+ suicide prevention services.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires OES, no later than June 1, 2027, to request the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to enable a press 3 function for calls originating in the State of California. A press 3 function shall allow callers to dial 988 and press “3” to be automatically routed to a specialized 988 call center.
- 2) Requires OES to additionally request authorization to enable text or chat features between a caller and a specialized 988 call center by texting “PRIDE” to 988.
- 3) Provides that the specialized 988 call center shall be a qualified entity that meets the requirements set forth in this bill.
- 4) Requires OES to, no later than 12 months following the approval by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration or its contracted 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Administrator, ensure that technologies are available to meet the requirements of this bill.
- 5) Requires, no later than 12 months following approval of the request submitted SAHMSA, the California Health and Human Services Agency to identify and contract with a qualified entity or entities, as provided, that specialize in LGBTQ+ suicide prevention services.
- 6) Requires a “qualified entity” to meet certain requirements, among which include:
 - a. Becoming a “988 center” as defined in existing law.
 - b. Maintaining specified policies to ensure privacy of callers.
 - c. Having a primary objective of reducing suicide rates or addressing mental health crises.
 - d. Demonstrating that its mission includes serving the LGBTQ+ population or that it employs staff or volunteers who have completed extensive training in responding to LGBTQ+ crisis contacts in a culturally competent manner.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Designates the 3-digit telephone number “9-8-8” as the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline pursuant the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 (NSHD). (Public Law No: 116-172)
- 2) Defines “988” to mean the three-digit telephone number designated by the Federal Communications Commission for the purpose of connecting individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis with the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system in accordance with Section 52.200 of Title 47 of the Code of Federal Regulations. [Government Code (GOV) § 53123.1.5 (a)]
- 3) Defines “988 center” to mean a center operating on a county or regional basis in California and participating in the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network to respond to statewide or regional 988 calls. [GOV § 53123.1.5 (b)]
- 4) Defines “National Suicide Prevention Lifeline” or “988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline” to mean the national network of local crisis hotline centers that provide free and confidential support to people in suicidal crisis or other behavioral health crisis 24 hours per day, seven days per week via a toll-free telephone hotline number that receives calls made through the 988 system, maintained by the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use under Section 520E-3 of the Public Health Service Act, Section 290bb-36c of Title 42 of the United States Code. [GOV § 53123.1.5 (e)]
- 5) Requires CHHSA to, no later than December 21, 2024, create a set of recommendations to support the five-year implementation plan for the 988 hotline, and to post regular updates on the CHHSA internet website regarding the implementation of 988 until December 31, 2029. [GOV § 53123.3]
- 6) Establishes the 988 State Suicide and Behavioral Health Crisis Services Fund and deposits funds through a surcharge on telephone access lines, currently set at \$0.05 through calendar year 2026 and a maximum of \$0.30 per access line thereafter. [GOV § 53123.4 (a), (b)]
- 7) Authorizes OES, in consultation with the State Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), to adopt regulations regarding how 988 funds received shall be disseminated to support the operations of the 988 system and related behavioral health crisis services. [GOV § 53123.4 (c)]
- 8) Requires OES to require an entity seeking moneys available through the 988 fund to annually file an expenditure and outcomes report containing specified information, including, among other things, the number of individuals served, the outcomes for individuals served, if known, and measures of system performance, including capacity, wait times, and the ability to meet demand for services. [GOV § 53123.4 (d)]
- 9) Prohibits a provider of health care, a health care service plan, or a contractor from releasing medical information related to a person seeking or obtaining gender-affirming health care or gender-affirming mental health care in response to a criminal or civil action, including a foreign subpoena, based on another state’s law that interferes with an individual’s right to seek or obtain gender-affirming health care or gender-affirming mental health care. Prohibits

a provider of health care, health care service plan, contractor, or employer from cooperating with or providing medical information to an individual, agency, or department from another state or, to the extent permitted by federal law, to a federal law enforcement agency that would identify an individual and that is related to an individual seeking or obtaining gender-affirming health care, as specified. [Civil Code § 56.109]

- 10) States it is the policy of the state that an out-of-state arrest warrant for an individual based on violating another state's law against providing, receiving, or allowing their child to receive gender-affirming health care or gender-affirming mental health care is the lowest law enforcement priority and limits California law enforcement's participation in related investigations. [Penal Code § 819]
- 11) Requires the Department of General Services to publish, or cause to be published, the California State Contracts Register, describing the contracts proposed by the state and establishes standards for the use of personal services contracts. [GOV § 14825, GOV §§ 19130-19135]
- 12) Establishes requirements for contracting by State agencies. [Public Contract Code §§ 10100-19150]
- 13) Creates a separate surcharge, beginning January 1, 2023, on each access line for each month for which a service user subscribes with a service supplier. Sets the 988 surcharge for the 2023 and 2024 calendar years at \$0.08 per access line per month and, for years beginning January 1, 2025, at an amount based on a specified formula, but no greater than \$0.30 per access line per month. Authorizes the 911 and 988 surcharges to be combined into a single-line item. [Revenue and Taxation Code § 41020, *et seq.*]

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal by the Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

- 1) *Double referral and committee jurisdiction.* This bill was first considered in the Assembly Health Committee, which has primary jurisdiction over health care policy and related considerations. Accordingly, this analysis will primarily focus on issues related to Communications & Conveyance Committee jurisdiction such as surcharges imposed on telephone access lines and related considerations.
- 2) *Purpose of this bill.* According to the author: "We have seen decades of hard-fought rights and services rolled back under this federal administration, including access to this proven lifesaving hotline. We will not stand by as our youth are pushed into crisis, lost to suicide, and forgotten. With AB 1540, California affirms its commitment and ensures we will not abandon our young people. It is heartbreaking to see a lifeline that received 1.5 million contacts over 3 years, and 70,000 contacts per month, ripped away over political talking points. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), schools were the 3rd most common location for reported hate crimes against LGBTQ+ youth, with incidents more than doubling between 2018 and 2022. Further, the Centers for Disease Control found that 20% of surveyed students who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual reported having attempted suicide, compared to 6% of their heterosexual peers. This rate jumps to nearly 26% for

transgender high school students. Our youth are in crisis. We are not pushing an agenda; we are trying to save lives.”

- 3) *988 Federal Legislative and Administrative History*. The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 (NSHD) designated 9-8-8 as the new three-digit number for the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline. The NSHD requires the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to designate 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline. The NSHD also authorized states to impose a fee on telephone users to fund the 9-8-8 hotlines within the states.

Federally, the 988 system is administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which operates the backbone of the 988 system through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network. In their role, SAMHSA is involved in approving 988 centers across the country that wish to participate in the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network. Under the call routing and networking architecture, all calls are first routed through the federal network then automatically routed to a local center within California based on geolocation and telephone number information. In that sense, the state 988 system is inherently linked to the federal network.

SAMHSA is also the federal agency that would approve the use and call-routing configurations necessary to implement a specialized helpline within the 988 system. For example, SAMHSA currently approves the administration of a Veterans Crisis Line that is accessed by first dialing 988 then pressing “1” to connect to veteran’s specific resources. This bill proposed a similar network configuration for LGBTQ+ specific resources utilizing a press “3” function. As is discussed in a later section, the Press “3” functionality previously existed but was recently disconnected across the country.

- 4) *988 State Legislative and Administrative History*. In California, AB 988 (Bauer-Kahan, Chapter 747, Statute of 2022) – The Miles Hall Lifeline and Suicide Prevention Act - established and implemented the statutory structure for California’s 988 systems and state 988 centers, in compliance with the federal requirements. Under the scheme, OES administers the 988 Fund and the process to calculate the surcharge fee based on appropriations made by the Legislature and access line data from service providers. OES calculates the surcharge rate and communicates the surcharge requirement to California Department of Tax and Fee Administration by October 1st each year. The surcharge is then assessed on end-user access lines, such as a cellphone or home phone line. The California Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) is tasked with the comprehensive implantation of the 988 center, including center oversight

Under existing law, the 988 surcharge was capped at \$0.08 per access line per month in the first two calendar years of enactment (2023 and 2024); in Fiscal Years 2022-2023, the \$0.08 surcharge fee generated \$44.3 million. Beginning January 1, 2025, the surcharge fee was reduced to \$0.05. The revenues generated from the surcharge are deposited in the 988 Fund to be used for purposes specified in existing law. Existing law requires that the funds be prioritized first to fund 988 centers operations but also authorizes the funds to be used upon appropriation by the Legislature for purposes outline within the Miles Hall Lifeline and Suicide Prevention Act. Under this bill, an entity selected by the California Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) would need to be qualified as a 988 center under state law.

Therefore, this bill does not propose an expansion of allowable uses for the 988 Fund as under existing law the first priority for the 988 Fund is to pay for 988 centers.

- 5) *What's the problem?* Since 2022 until recently, SAMHSA had collaborated on the 988 system with several non-profit organizations that offer specialized services designed to prevent LGBTQ+ youth suicide – the largest provider being The Trevor Project. Callers could dial 988 and press “3” to automatically be routed to LGBTQ+ youth crisis support. In June of 2025, President Trump announced that all funding and partnerships would end. Effective July 17, 2025, all national 988 call centers are unable to transfer youth in crisis to these organizations. According to the statement from SAMHS:

“On July 17, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline will no longer silo LGB+ youth services, also known as the “Press 3 option,” to [instead] focus on serving *all* help seekers, including those previously served through the Press 3 option.”

According to supporters of this bill, this has led to a massive gap in care and specialized services for a population with an overwhelming need for support. The problems as they see it are: 988 Call Centers in California have limited capacity to send callers to specialized LGBTQ+ suicide prevention providers, there is limited funding for non-profits to offer similar levels of service independently of 988, and ending this service abruptly places tens of thousands of children at risk. This bill attempts to address the problem by requiring OES take the step to enable the replacement of a Press “3” function in California’s 988 system.

If implemented, these additional LGBTQ+ specialized services would, in addition to better serving LGBTQ+ individuals, add more capacity to the 988 system in California as they are required to be 988 centers under this bill. In turn, this bill could actually serve to make 988 service more readily available within the state. As the 988 system currently exists in California, some calls are routed to other states because of a lack of capacity within California to respond to contacts originating within the state. The additional capacity would reduce the strain on existing providers and increase availability for all 988 centers in California to respond to a growing number of calls.

Despite the potential benefits to the system in general, it is unclear whether SAMHSA would be willing to approve a request from California given the recent change in federal policy. This bill does not provide any procedures or sunset language if SAMHSA ultimately decides to deny OES’s request. Going forward, the author may wish to consider including procedures for the possibility this bill is ultimately unimplementable because of cooperation from the federal government.

- 6) *Recent/related legislation.*

- a. AB 988 (Mathis), Chapter 460, Statutes of 2023, requires an entity receiving funds from the 988 State Suicide and Behavioral Health Crisis Services Fund to report on the number of individuals served who self-identified as veterans or active military personnel, if known.
- b. AB 118 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 42, Statutes of 2023, made several changes relevant to 988. Requires a health care service plan or health insurer that is contacted by a 988 center, mobile crisis team, or other provider of behavioral health crisis services to, within 30 minutes of initial contact, either authorize post-stabilization

- care or inform the provider that it will arrange for the prompt transfer of the enrollee's care to another provider. Revised the statutory definition of 988, requires CHHSA to create recommendations to support the five-year implementation plan, authorizes the Legislature to consider additional uses for 988 revenue based on CHHSA and 988 PAG recommendations, and more.
- c. AB 988 (Bauer Kahan), Chapter 747, Statutes of 2022, established the 988 Crisis Hotline Center for the purpose of connecting individuals experiencing a mental health crisis with suicide prevention and mental health services, as specified. Requires OES to require an entity seeking funds from the 988 Fund to annually file an expenditure and outcomes report.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Alliance for Children's Rights
 Alliance for Transyouth Liberation
 Asian Americans Advancing Justice-southern California
 Behavioral Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission
 California Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
 California Alliance of Caregivers
 California Alliance of Child and Family Services
 California Association of School Psychologists
 California Association of Social Rehabilitation Agencies
 California Behavioral Health Planning Council
 California Latinas for Reproductive Justice
 California Legislative Lgbtq Caucus
 California Primary Care Association
 California Psychological Association
 California School-based Health Alliance
 California State Association of Psychiatrists (CSAP)
 Center for the Pacific Asian Family
 Children Now
 County of Santa Clara
 Culver City Democratic Club
 Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services
 El/la Para Translatinas
 Equality California
 Gender Affirming Professionals
 Indivisible CA Statestrong
 Indivisible Ca: Statestrong
 Interim INC.
 Jewish Center for Justice
 Latino Equality Alliance
 Los Angeles County
 Los Angeles Lgbt Center
 Multi-faith Action Coalition

Nasw California
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI-CA)
National Center for Youth Law (NCYL)
National Health Law Program
Pacific Clinics
Pflag Oakland-east Bay
Pflag Sacramento
Pflag San Diego County
Pflag San Francisco
Pflag San Gabriel Valley Asian Pacific Islander
Pflag Santa Clarita
Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California
Pride At the Pier
Psychiatric Physicians Alliance of California (PPAC)
Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition
San Diego Pride
Santa Monica Democratic Club
Seneca Family of Agencies
St Anne's Family Services
The Children's Partnership
The Los Angeles Trust for Children's Health
The Translatin@ Coalition
Transfamily Support Services
Transgender Health & Wellness Center

Opposition

California Teachers Supporting Gender-nonconforming Youth
Cause: Californians United for Sex-based Evidence in Policy and Law
Democrats for an Informed Approach to Gender
Protection of the Educational Rights of Kids
Save Glendora Schools
Women are Real

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