

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
 Buffy Wicks, Chair
 AB 1540 (Mark González) – As Amended March 19, 2026

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| Policy Committee: | Health | Vote: 12 - 3 |
| | Communications and Conveyance | 7 - 0 |

Urgency: Yes State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires 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 call center specializing in LGBTQ+ suicide prevention services, and to enable text or chat features by texting “PRIDE” to 988.

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, for calls originating in California, a ‘press 3’ function to allow callers to dial 988 and press “3” to be automatically routed to a specialized 988 call center.
- 2) Requires OES to request authorization to enable text or chat features between a caller and a specialized 988 call center by texting “PRIDE” to 988.
- 3) Requires the specialized 988 call center be a qualified entity that meets specified requirements, including having a primary objective of reducing suicide rates or addressing mental health crises, maintaining policies to ensure the privacy of callers, among other requirements.
- 4) Requires OES to, no later than 12 months following the approval by SAMHSA or its contracted administrator, ensure that call, text, and chat technologies in items 1 and 2, above, are available.
- 5) Requires, no later than 12 months following approval from SAMHSA, the California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS) to identify and contract with a qualified entity or entities that specialize in LGBTQ+ suicide prevention services.
- 6) Contains an urgency clause.

FISCAL EFFECT:

The author, along with other Assemblymembers, has requested augmentation of the 988 State Suicide and Behavioral Health Crisis Services Fund (988 Fund) for CalHHS and OES to access up to \$5 million for fiscal year (FY) 2026-27, and up to \$2.6 million per year thereafter, to implement the provisions of this bill. The 988 Fund contains revenues generated by the 988

surcharge on end-user access lines, such as cell phone or home phone lines.

Cal OES estimates initial costs of \$1.79 million and \$791,000 ongoing for three positions. Costs will depend on the number of 988 centers established to meet statewide demand. OES states initial costs would include one-time expenses of up to \$1 million for telecommunications infrastructure. These costs would be part of the budget allocation requested by the author.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** This bill is sponsored by Equality California and the California Alliance of Children and Family Services (CA Alliance). 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...that received 1.5 million contacts over 3 years, and 70,000 contacts per month...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.

- 2) **Background.** The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline or 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is made up of a network of over 200 independently owned and operated local centers. There are eleven 988 call centers in California. Beginning in 2022, under a pilot program, pressing “3” would direct a caller to an LGBTQ+ specific crisis line. The federal government ended support for the “press 3” option on July 17, 2025, eliminating the program nationwide.

AB 988 (Bauer-Kahan), Chapter 747, Statutes of 2022, created a surcharge, beginning January 1, 2023, on each access line for each month for which a service user subscribes with a service supplier. The 988 surcharge for the 2023 and 2024 calendar years was set at \$0.08 per access line, and beginning January 1, 2025, at an amount based on a specified formula, not to exceed \$0.30 per line. In FY 2022-23, the \$0.08 surcharge fee generated \$44.3 million. Beginning January 1, 2025, the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration (CDTFA) reduced the surcharge to \$0.05. Revenues generated from the surcharge are deposited in the 988 Fund to be used for purposes specified in statute, which requires the funds be prioritized first to fund 988 center operations but also authorizes the funds to be used upon appropriation by the Legislature for purposes outlined in AB 988.

AB 988 requires CalHHS to select entities qualified as 988 centers. OES oversees 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 CDTFA by October 1 each year. The surcharge is then assessed on end-user access lines.

- 3) **Opposition.** Our Duty-USA opposes this bill, stating it is doing exactly what the Federal government has said that it cannot. Our Duty argues this bill silos calls off to the Trevor Project, and that if the goal is truly suicide prevention, there are established suicide hotlines that focus specifically on crisis intervention without incorporating other ideological content. Our Duty opposes what it sees as the sexualization of children through public education.

SFV Alliance states this bill is another example of LGBTQ+ exceptionalism and is counterproductive, segregating, and can be harmful by isolating children and adults alike.

- 4) **Concerns.** The California Behavioral Health Association (CBHA) states California 988 call centers already provide culturally responsive services to LGBTQ+ callers and this bill risks signaling that existing 988 providers lack this capacity, which does not reflect realities across much of the state. CBHA also states that its members expressed concerns that additional mandated routing options may fragment that system, increase call complexity, and create operational inefficiencies during periods of high call volume.

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