
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Senator Henry Stern

Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 1540 **Hearing Date:** 6/23/2026
Author: Mark González
Version: 6/15/2026 Amended
Urgency: Yes **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Cassie Royce

SUBJECT: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: LGBTQ+ youth

SUMMARY: Directs the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to establish a dedicated "Press 3" function within the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (988) to direct a caller to a LGBTQ+ specific crisis line, if the California Health and Human Services Agency (CHHSA) makes an annual determination first, as specified.

ANALYSIS:

Existing federal law establishes the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act, which designates "988" as the universal, three-digit dialing code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (now known as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline) maintained through the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Existing state law:

- 1) Designates Cal OES as the lead state agency responsible for addressing natural, technological, or man-made disaster and emergencies, including activities necessary to prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of emergencies and disasters to people and property.
- 2) Establishes, pursuant to AB 988 (Bauer-Kahan), Chapter 747, Statutes of 2022, the Miles Hall Lifeline and Suicide Prevention Act, to implement the national 988 system in California, and creates the 988 State Suicide and Behavioral Health Crisis Services Fund to receive revenue generated by a specified surcharge on telephone access lines.

- 3) Requires Cal OES to implement and oversee the technology infrastructure, coordination, and transfer of calls between 988, 911, and behavioral health crisis services.

This bill:

- 1) Makes numerous legislative findings and declarations for purposes of this bill, including the following legislative intent:
 - a) It is the intent of the State of California to continue its long history of advancing policies that support suicide prevention efforts and further the initiative to address our youth mental health crisis. Young LGBTQ+ Californians have benefited from the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline's LGBTQ+ Youth Specialized Services program since 2022.
 - b) It is the intent of the Legislature to reinstate this program in California.
- 2) Requires the CHHSA to annually determine whether an adequate specialized LGBTQ+ suicide prevention hotline is activated by the federal government under 988.
- 3) Provides that Cal OES and the CHHSA shall implement the requirements of this bill only after the CHHSA has determined that the specialized hotline in 2) above has not been activated.
- 4) Directs Cal OES, no later than six months after the CHHSA determination in 3) above, to request 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.
- 5) Requires Cal OES to request authorization to enable text or chat features between a caller and a specialized 988 call center, as specified.
- 6) Requires the specialized 988 call center to be a qualified entity that meets specified requirements, including maintaining policies that comply with medical confidentiality laws, as specified.
- 7) Requires Cal OES, no later than 12 months following the approval by SAMHSA or its contracted administrator, to ensure that the required call, text, and chat technologies in 4) and 5) above are available.
- 8) Directs the CHHSA, no later than 12 months following approval from SAMHSA, to identify and contract with a qualified entity or entities that

specialize in LGBTQ+ suicide prevention services.

9) Contains an urgency clause.

Background

Author's statement. 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. 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. 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. We will not stand by as our youth are pushed into crisis, lost to suicide, and forgotten. AB 1540 provides an option for California to restart a program under federal uncertainty. It is a commitment to our community that we will hold the federal government accountable, and if they choose hate, if they choose to divide our community, we will step up. Our youth are in crisis. We are not pushing an agenda; we are trying to save lives.”

988. According to SAMHSA, 988 is a phone, chat, and text service that provides free and confidential support to people in suicidal crisis or mental health related distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the U.S. The network consists of more than 200 local, independent, and state crisis centers staffed with skilled, trained crisis counselors. 988 offers specialized services for Spanish-language speakers and people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and connects veterans, service members, and their families to the Veterans Crisis Line for tailored support. 988 also uses Language Line Solutions to provide interpretation to callers in more than 240 additional languages.

In September 2022, Governor Newsom signed AB 988 to ensure and expand services for Californians experiencing a behavioral health crisis. When Californians dial 988, they are directed to one of 12 crisis call centers. The call is routed based on the caller's area code. If a local crisis center is unable to take the call, the caller is automatically routed to a national backup crisis center.

The role of Cal OES. Cal OES is required to verify 988 technology allows for transfers between 988 centers as well as between 988 centers and 911 public safety answering points, commonly known as dispatch centers. Cal OES indicates that all 988 centers have the capability to transfer calls to other 988 centers and to and from 911 dispatch centers. Cal OES has validated this interoperability through controlled test calls and successful live transfers. According to Cal OES, these

efforts confirm that both the technical capability and functional interoperability required under statute have been established.

Cal OES reports that it does not anticipate any impact on 988 and 911 interoperability related to deployment of the statewide Next Generation (NG) 911 system. According to Cal OES, moving all dispatch centers to NG 911 from the existing legacy 911 system will further improve the ability of dispatchers to transfer and receive calls with 988 centers. Cal OES indicates that it also continues to work with 988 providers on their modernization and technology needs and will ensure any buildout of 988 technology sustains or improves compatibility with NG 911. Ongoing work will continue to focus on strengthening consistency and operational protocols across systems.

Federal Changes. Beginning in 2022, under a pilot program, pressing “3” after dialing 988 directed a caller to an LGBTQ+ specific crisis line. The federal government ended support for the 988 “Press 3” option on July 17, 2025, eliminating the service nationwide. According to a letter dated June 9, 2026, from SAMHSA, the federal 2026 Labor and Health and Human Services Appropriations Act directs SAMHSA to restore \$33.1M for Specialized Services for LGBTQ+ Youth, including the 988 “Press 3” option. Specifically, SAMHSA is required to provide specialized services for LGBTQ+ youth, including training for existing counselors in LGBTQ+ youth cultural competency and the establishment and operation of an Integrated Voice Response to transfer LGBTQ+ youth to a specialty organization. SAMHSA notes in the letter that it “is currently assessing the most appropriate approach to implementing this congressional directive for the “Press 3” option....[and] regardless, the 988 Lifeline will continue to serve all callers, providing 24/7 access to skilled, caring, and culturally competent crisis counselors for individuals experiencing suicidal, substance use, or mental health crises.”

This bill establishes a process to restore the 988 “Press 3” option in California, contingent upon an annual specified determination by the CHHSA.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

SUPPORT:

California Alliance of Child and Family Services (co-sponsor)

Equality California (co-sponsor)

Alameda County Office of Education

All for Kids

Alliance for Children's Rights
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Behavioral Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission
Cal Voices
California Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists
California Association of School Psychologists
California Association of Social Rehabilitation Agencies
California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls
California Family Resource Association
California Fire Chiefs Association
California Primary Care Association
California School-Based Health Alliance
California Youth Empowerment Network
Child Abuse Prevention Center
County Behavioral Health Directors Association
County of Santa Clara
County Welfare Directors Association of California
Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services
Drug Policy Alliance
El/La Para TransLatinas
Fire Districts Association of California
Health Officers Association of California
Hmong Innovating Politics
Indivisible CA: StateStrong
John Burton Advocates for Youth
LGBTQ+ Inclusivity, Visibility, and Empowerment
Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis
Los Angeles County
Los Angeles LGBT Center
Los Angeles Unified School District
Lyon-Martin Community Health Services
Mental Health America of California
Multi-faith ACTION Coalition
National Alliance on Mental Illness California
National Center for Youth Law
National Health Law Program
Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays San Jose/Peninsula
Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California
Prevent Child Abuse California
Safe Kids California
San Diego LGBT Community Center

San Francisco AIDS Foundation
Santa Monica Democratic Club
Seneca Family of Agencies
Viet Voices

OPPOSITION:

California Teachers Supporting Gender Non-Conforming Youth
Californians United for Sex-Based Evidence in Policy and Law
Democrats for an Informed Approach to Gender
Lesbians Advocating for a Resilient Future
LGB Alliance USA Foundation
Our Duty-USA
Save Glendora Schools
Women Are Real

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: In support of this bill, the co-sponsors, California Alliance of Child and Family Services and Equality California write that, “Given the disproportionate risk of suicide for LGBTQ+ individuals, queer youth need and deserve specialized suicide prevention services. AB 1540 provides a much-needed solution by re-establishing the 988 “Press 3” program that successfully helped many LGBTQ+ individuals before the federal government eliminated the program. AB 1540 also incorporates amendments to ensure that the State will not duplicate efforts, should the federal government restart the “Press 3” line nationally. AB 1540 is a life-saving bill, ensuring that all LGBTQ+ youth in California, once again, have access to critical and lifesaving suicide and crisis intervention.”

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION: In opposition to this bill, Our Duty-USA writes that, “The federal government’s decision to end LGBTQ+-specialized routing reflects a policy judgment that all callers in crisis should receive the same evidence-based crisis intervention services rather than being sorted by identity category. Whether one agrees with that policy or not, California’s response should be to strengthen general 988 infrastructure for all youth in crisis, not to recreate an ideologically directed subnetwork that routes minors to organizations whose primary mission is LGBTQ+ affirmation.”

DUAL REFERRAL: Senate Emergency Management Committee and Senate Health Committee