

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Sophie Walsh 271-3469

HB 597, establishing a designated behavioral health access point within the enhanced 911 system.

Hearing Date: April 9, 2025

Time Opened: 1:34 p.m.

Time Closed: 1:44 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Rochefort, Avard, Prentiss and Long

Members of the Committee Absent: Senator Birdsell

Bill Analysis: This bill defines the designated behavioral health access point within the enhanced 911 system to enable the division of emergency services and communications to transfer 911 calls from individuals experiencing non-emergent behavioral health crises and mental health needs to appropriate service providers.

The bill is a request of the department of safety, division of emergency services and communications.

Sponsors:

Rep. B. Boyd

Rep. Miles

Rep. Petrigno

Rep. Presa

Rep. Rhodes

Rep. Wheeler

Rep. N. Murphy

Sen. Avard

Sen. Birdsell

Sen. Long

Sen. McGough

Sen. Prentiss

Who supports the bill: 65 people signed in support of the bill. Full sign in sheets are available upon request by contacting the Legislative Aide, Sophie Walsh (Sophie.Walsh@gc.nh.gov).

Who opposes the bill: 3 people signed in opposition of the bill. Full sign in sheets are available upon request by contacting the Legislative Aide, Sophie Walsh (Sophie.Walsh@gc.nh.gov).

Who is neutral on the bill: 1 person signed in neutral to the bill. Full sign in sheets are available upon request by contacting the Legislative Aide, Sophie Walsh (Sophie.Walsh@gc.nh.gov).

Summary of testimony presented:

Representative Bill Boyd, Hillsborough – District 12

- Representative Boyd stated that this bill establishes a behavioral health access point within the enhanced 911 system.
- This bill was unanimously passed by the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee and passed the House on a voice vote with bipartisan support.
- Representative Boyd worked with Director Mark Doyle of the Division of Emergency Services and Communications on this bill.

Tim Scott, Assistant Director – New Hampshire Emergency Services and Communications

- Mr. Scott stated that he is speaking in support of this bill.
- This bill reflects that the 911 system can transfer appropriate calls to the 988 system for mental health assistance.
- There are current policies for transferring calls between 911 and 988 that are functionally working well. This updates the law to reflect what is working today.
- Senator Rochefort inquired about putting the 988 system under the 911 system.
- Mr. Scott explained there is not a good way to do that because 911 and 988 are very different services with different people calling them.
- In the 911 system, there are a lot of provisions put in place by telecommunication providers for people calling 911 for life-threatening emergencies. Those provisions do not go in place for other calls to other agencies.
- If someone were to not pick up their phone, the current protocol within the 911 system is to locate the individual and send emergency crews to them. Mr. Scott explained that this is not necessarily what someone would want to do with a 988 call.
- Senator Rochefort asked how many calls per year 911 receives that would be appropriate for 988.
- Mr. Scott said he does not have those numbers.

Holly Stevens, NAMI NH

- Ms. Stevens stated that she is speaking in support of this bill.
- She addressed Senator Rochefort's question about combining these systems and explained that while 911 is a triage system, most of the calls received by 988 are resolved on the phone. It is common for people to work with individuals on the phone for 15-30 minutes.
- NAMI is in support of this bill because some people are still not aware of 988 and call 911 when experiencing a mental health crisis. Fortunately, New Hampshire's 911 system works closely with 988.
- Ms. Stevens emphasized that this is not changing current practice, as it is simply codifying the current protocol.

- She explained that transferring calls between 911 and 988 makes sense for several reasons.
- It frees up space in the 911 system to respond to physical health and public safety emergencies.
- 988 staff have specialized training to support people in a crisis and connect them with services in the community. 80-90% of 988 calls are resolved on the phone.

Jenny O'Higgins, Department of Health and Human Services

- Ms. O'Higgins explained that nationally there are three pillars to a best practice behavioral health system: someone to talk to, someone to respond, and somewhere to go.
- This bill is related to the 'someone to talk to' pillar, as it allows 911 to transfer appropriate calls to the 988 rapid response system.
- The Department of Health and Human Services has had a great partnership with the Department of Safety in creating protocols to make this work well in New Hampshire.
- Ms. O'Higgins emphasized that New Hampshire has done a great job ensuring that mental health professionals and first responders work in partnership to support people in receiving the proper response, having safer interactions, and getting people the care they need.