

Massachusetts 988 Commission

Meeting Minutes

8/15/2024

1:00pm – 2:30pm

Date of meeting: 8/15/2024

Start time: 1:10pm

End time: 2:30pm

Location: Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

| Count | Members participating remotely | Vote 1 | Vote 2 |
|-------|--|--------|--------|
| 1 | Rebecca Ames – Riverside Trauma Center, Riverside Community Care | - | - |
| 2 | Danielle Bolduc – Director of the Suicide Prevention Program | X | X |
| 3 | Chris Carleton – Northborough Police Department | - | - |
| 4 | Kelly Casey, PhD – Department of Forensic & Clinical Services at William James College | X | X |
| 5 | Courtney Chelo – Mass. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC) | - | X |
| 6 | Undersecretary Kerry Collins – Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) | X | X |
| 7 | Commissioner Brooke Doyle – Department of Mental Health | A | X |
| 8 | Eriq Gasse – Cataldo Ambulance Service | - | - |
| 9 | Rebekah Gewirtz – National Association of Social Workers - MA & RI Chapter | X | X |
| 10 | Sharon Hanson – Mass. Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP) | A | X |
| 11 | Debbie Helms – Samaritans Merrimack Valley | X | X |
| 12 | Jessica Larochelle in leu of Jennifer Honig – Mass. Association for Mental Health (MAMH) | A | X |
| 13 | Charmain Jackman, PhD – InnoPsych, Inc. | - | - |
| 14 | Karin Jeffers – Clinical & Support Options (CSO) | X | X |
| 15 | Kathy Marchi – Samaritans, Inc. | - | - |
| 16 | Paul Mina – United Way of Tri County & United Way of Pioneer Valley, Mass 211 | X | X |
| 17 | Ivy Moody – Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee (MHLAC) | X | X |
| 18 | Kristen Rhodes – City of Northampton Division of Community Care | - | - |
| 19 | Pam Sager – Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL) | X | - |
| 20 | (NEW) Pata Suyemoto - National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association | A | X |
| 21 | (NEW) Joan Taglieri - Cambridge Health Alliance | - | - |
| 22 | Monna Wallace – State 911 Department | A | X |
| 23 | Chair Kelley Cunningham – Division of Violence and Injury Prevention, DPH | X | X |

* (X) Voted in favor; (O) Opposed; (A) Abstained from vote; (-) Absent from meeting or during vote

Proceedings:

Chair Kelley Cunningham, Director of the Division of Violence and Injury Prevention at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Chair of the 988 Commission called the meeting of the 988 Commission to order.

Chair Kelley Cunningham welcomed all attendees, expressing gratitude for their presence and flexibility regarding the rescheduling of the meeting, originally planned for July.

Informed participants that the meeting is subject to the open meeting law and reminded everyone to keep their microphones muted unless speaking.

Introduced Pata Suyemoto, National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association, as the new 988 Commission member representing lived experience, and welcomed Jessica Larochelle, who is attending on behalf of Jennifer Honig from MAMH.

Reported that Dr. Myesha Rodrigues is no longer part of the commission. Efforts are underway to appoint a new representative for that position, with hopes of finalizing it before the next meeting.

Roll call conducted by Brenda-liz for approval of minutes.

Vote 1 on approval of meeting minutes: Paul Mina introduced a motion to approve the May 13th meeting minutes, which was seconded by Undersecretary Kerry Collins and approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).

Chair Kelley Cunningham addressed the following:

- Provided an update on the budget for FY25, announcing the allocation of \$6.5 million specifically for the 988 initiatives, which will be contracted out to the centers.
- Reminded members that a primary task of the commission is to make recommendations on sustainable funding for 988, particularly focusing on surcharge fees. Presenters from the suicide prevention program were invited to share their insights on this matter.
- Introduced today's presenters from Accenture: Rohail Premjee, Lawrence Zhang, Dea Biancarelli, Justin Sterritt who have been analyzing 988 surcharge options and sustainable revenue mechanisms.

Presenters from Accenture:

Rohail Premjee, Lawrence Zhang, and Dea Biancarelli presented an analysis of 988 surcharge options and sustainable revenue mechanisms. Key findings included:

1. Overview of the Presentation:

- Rohail introduced the purpose of the presentation, focusing on the analysis of the 988 surcharge and sustainable revenue mechanisms across the country.
- Collaboration with the Department of Public Health and external stakeholders, including interviews with policy experts, was highlighted.

2. **State-by-State Analysis:**

- A scan of all 58 states' legislation regarding 988 implementation was conducted.
- Differences in how 988 operates across states were emphasized, particularly regarding funding and service expansion.
- Key funding mechanisms identified: operational funding, service expansion, and infrastructure development.

3. **Surcharge Mechanisms:**

- Discussion on the increasing trend of states enacting legislative surcharges for 988.
- Three main revenue sources were identified: live surcharges, trust funds, and state general appropriations.
- Lawrence elaborated on the potential legislative amendments required for Massachusetts to implement a surcharge.

4. **Trust Fund Implementation:**

- Establishing a trust fund for 988 to ensure sustainable, long-term funding without the risk of legislative cuts affecting service levels.
- Examples from other states like Kentucky and Missouri provided context on the potential for a trust fund model.

5. **Public Support for Surcharges:**

- Survey data showed strong public support for a surcharge, especially when linked to the funding of public health services like 988.
- Americans expressed willingness to pay a surcharge, with support increasing after awareness of existing 911 surcharges.

6. **Revenue Potential in Massachusetts:**

- A comparison of the proposed 988 surcharge with the existing 911 surcharge in Massachusetts.
- Estimated revenue implications based on different surcharge amounts discussed, indicating potential significant increases in funding for 988 operations.

7. **Conclusion:**

- The presentation concluded with a call for discussion on the recommendations and next steps for implementing a sustainable funding mechanism for 988 in Massachusetts.

Q&A Session:

- **Chair Kelley Cunningham:** Opened the Q&A session, noting the current spending on 988 services is approximately \$10 to \$11 million.
- **Danielle Bolduc:** Confirmed the figure, mentioning the volume of calls has recently exceeded 7,000, indicating growth. Additional costs exist that are not yet accounted for.

- **Rebekah Gewirtz:** Inquired whether the \$11 million is expected to continue and its sources, specifically regarding the trust fund or federal funding.
- **Danielle Bolduc:** Explained that funding comes from general appropriations, with some federal grant money secured until September 2026.
- **Rebekah Gewirtz:** Asked if the grant money will end and if there is an opportunity to reapply.
- **Danielle Bolduc:** Stated it's too early to determine future grants; monitoring will continue until 2025.
- **Rebekah Gewirtz:** Expressed concerns about instituting new fees, emphasizing the regressive nature of user fees and advocating for state-funded services through tax revenue instead.
- **Chair Kelley Cunningham:** Agreed on the need for sustainable funding, noting that a surcharge could supplement existing funding rather than replace it.
- **Ivy Moody:** Raised a question about how population numbers are derived and whether they accurately reflect users in Massachusetts.
- **Rohail Premjee:** Clarified that the revenue collection number is based on all phone lines charged for 911 operations, not just the population, explaining discrepancies related to commercial lines and area codes.
- **Rebekah Gewirtz:** Highlighted concerns for low-income individuals who may face multiple charges for phone lines.
- **Rohail Premjee:** Confirmed that all lines incur a fee, and individuals may not realize they are being charged for 911 services.
- **Undersecretary Kerry Collins:** Asked about the genesis of the trust fund and its operation in Massachusetts.
- **Rohail Premjee:** Explained that the trust fund operates similarly to the Massachusetts 911 system, where unallocated funds roll back into the trust.
- **Chair Kelley Cunningham:** Questioned about future cost estimates for 988 services.
- **Danielle Bolduc:** Indicated that future costs would exceed the current \$10 million, considering personnel and technology needs.
- **Commissioner Brooke Doyle:** Asked about the anticipated impact of geolocation on 988 call volumes, particularly concerning the diverse population in Massachusetts.
- **Rohail Premjee:** Explained that while geolocation has been used for 911, revenue is still based on the number of phone lines. An estimated increase of 16,500 calls in fiscal year 25 is expected due to geolocation.
- **Lawrence Zhang:** Expanded on the analysis, mentioning the influx of out-of-state and international students contributing to this increase.
- **Commissioner Brooke Doyle:** Highlighted concerns regarding the sustainability of funding for 988 services and the need for a collection mechanism that keeps pace with growing call volumes.

- **Rohail Premjee:** Confirmed that the analysis includes annual growth and calls that might transition from 911 to 988.
- **Paul Mina:** Shared insights from his experience founding Massachusetts 211, emphasizing the difficulty of relying on annual state funding. He advocated for a more stable funding model based on active phone lines.
- **Debbie Helms:** Added that a small surcharge could provide necessary services for those struggling with mental health issues, emphasizing the importance of consistent access to support.
- **Dea Biancarelli:** Suggested that a flat fee surcharge could be easier to implement through legislation, although more complex approaches might be considered.
- **Rohail Premjee:** Agreed, noting that a flat rate could be regressive, but it simplifies the implementation process.
- **Ivy Moody:** Expressed the need for transparency and public trust in the funding process, suggesting a combined recommendation for a surcharge while emphasizing the importance of including it in the state budget.
- **Commissioner Brooke Doyle:** Shared concerns about relying solely on state budget allocations, especially given the potential for budget cuts affecting workforce and service sustainability.
- **Undersecretary Kerry Collins:** Explained the legislative process for rate-setting and the challenges posed by potentially high surcharge rates.
- **Ivy Moody:** Raised questions about how surcharges would affect individuals using state-funded phones and emphasized the need for affordable solutions for vulnerable populations.
- **Pata Suyemoto:** Raised the question about the possibility of implementing low-income exceptions for any surcharges, expressing concern about how it might complicate funding predictability.
- **Chair Cunningham:** Acknowledged the need to explore this idea further but did not provide a concrete response.
- **Rebekah Gewirtz:** Emphasized the critical nature of 988 services, comparing them to essential services like police and fire departments, which are not funded through surcharges. She expressed her reluctance to adopt a surcharge model and highlighted the importance of advocating for sustained state funding.
- **Chair Kelley Cunningham:** Agreed, stating that while she hopes for continued state funding, the growing demand for 988 services necessitates a reevaluation of funding strategies, especially with additional services like text and chat coming online.
- **Commissioner Brooke Doyle:** Clarified that if low-income exemptions were to be considered, they would need to be incorporated into the funding methodology, which would require legislative approval and would deviate from the current model.

- **Chair Kelley Cunningham:** Highlighted that as 988 grows, funding requirements are likely to increase, making it essential to plan for potential shortfalls in state support.

Next Steps and Future Meetings:

Jessica Larochelle: Summarized that continued advocacy for adequate state funding is crucial, emphasizing that funding supports not only 988 but also multiple related organizations.

Chair Kelley Cunningham: Proposed inviting representatives from states with implemented surcharges to discuss their experiences at the next meeting, scheduled for **September 30th**.

Rebekah Gewirtz: Suggested exploring states without surcharges to understand their funding strategies, indicating a dual approach would provide comprehensive insights.

Jessica Larochelle: Commented on the different municipal approaches to surcharges and noted that learning from both types of states would be beneficial.

Chair Kelley Cunningham: Agreed, mentioning the importance of understanding state-specific contexts as 988 implementation varies widely across the country.

Vote 2 to adjourn: A motion to adjourn was made by Undersecretary Collins and seconded by Paul Mina and approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).