Massachusetts 988 Commission

Meeting Minutes
August 17th, 2026
1:30pm – 3:00pm

Date of meeting: Monday, August 17th, 2026
Start time: 1:33 PM
End time: 2:46 PM
Location: Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

Count	Members participating remotely	Vote 1	Vote 2
1	Kelley Cunningham – Director for the Division of Violence and Injury Prevention at DPH	X	X
2	Patrick Bowlin - Current or former consumer of mental health or substance use disorder supports or services	–	–
3	Kelly Casey, PhD – Department of Forensic & Clinical Services at William James College	X	X
4	Rebekah Caylor – Raynham Police Department (MCPA), 911 Dispatcher	X	X
5	Courtney Chelo – Mass. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC)	X	X
6	Kerry Collins – Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS)	_	_
7	Rebekah Gewirtz – National Association of Social Workers - MA & RI Chapter	X	X
8	Jill Lack – CEO of Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP)	X	X
9	Debbie Helms – Samaritans Merrimack Valley	X	X
10	Jessica Larochelle – Mass. Association for Mental Health (MAMH)	_	_
11	Jacqueline Hubbard – National Alliance on Mental Illness Massachusetts (NAMI-MA)	X	X
12	Charmain Jackman, PhD – InnoPsych, Inc.	X	X
13	Karin Jeffers – Clinical & Support Options (CSO)	_	_
14	Kathy Marchi – Samaritans, Inc.	A	X
15	Kimberly Martin – Riverside Trauma Center – Riverside Community Care	X	X
16	Eileen Davis – CEO Mass 211 and Director of Call to Talk	A	X
17	Ivy Moody – Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee (MHLAC)	A	X
18	Pam Sager – Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL)	A	X
19	Pata Suyemoto - National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association	A	X
20	Joan Taglieri - Cambridge Health Alliance	A	_
21	Mio Tamanaha – Department of Mental Health	A	X
22	Stacy Vail – Cataldo Ambulance Service, Paramedic	_	_
23	Monna Wallace – State 911 Department	A	X
24	Sam Langstein - Current or former consumer of mental health or substance use disorder supports or services	–	–
25	Chair Ruth Blodgett – Bureau Director for the Bureau of Community Health and Prevention	A	X

*** (X)** Voted in favor; **(O)** Opposed; **(A)** Abstained from vote; **(-)** Absent from meeting or during vote
**** Vote 1**: Roll Call and Minutes Approval; **Vote 2:** Adjournment

Welcome and Call to Order

Ruth Blodgett greeted the Commission members and meeting attendees and announced herself as the new chair of the 988 Commission. She let everyone know that meeting was being recorded and called the meeting to order. She announced that the first item on the agenda would be to conduct a roll call vote on the April 13th meeting minutes and asked for a motion from the Commission members to approve the minutes.

April Meeting Minutes

Courtney Chelo made a motion to approve the April 13th meeting minutes, and Kathy Marchi seconded the motion.

Vote 1 on approval of the April meeting minutes: The April 13th minutes were approved by roll-call vote.

After the vote the presentation deck was shared on screen. Ruth walked the group through the rest of the planned agenda items including a moment of silence for Paul Mina, 988 Commission introductions, reviewing the statutory charge, a discussion on prioritizing key topics, upcoming meetings and next steps, and ending with meeting adjournment.

Moment of Silence for Paul Mina

Ruth handed it off to Kelley Cunningham to lead the moment of silence for Paul. Kelley noted that this group has not had the opportunity to come together to remember Paul since his sudden passing on May 8th, 2026. The 988 Commission remembers Paul as a deeply respected leader who brought kindness, humor, wisdom and humanity to everyone that had the privilege of knowing him. Paul had a great legacy that lives on through the programs he helped create and the many lives he touched. Paul was a member of the 988 Commission since its inception representing Mass 211 in the United Way of Tri County. Paul was passionate about his work; he had a vibrant personality and was an all-around incredible person who is greatly missed.

Moment of silence

Ruth thanked Kelley and acknowledged the tremendous loss for many of the people on this call both personally and professionally.

Commission and Staff Member Introductions

Since it had been some time since the Commission came together, and there were also two new Commission members – Eileen Davis and the new chair, Ruth Blodgett – as well as some new staff members, Justin Sheng and Brian Dupre (replacing Rebecca Ashby), this meeting served as an ideal time to introduce and reintroduce everyone. Ruth called on the group members one by one to introduce themselves.

Commission Member Introductions:

- Introductions began with Eileen Davis who is now the CEO of Mass 211. Eileen noted that she is honored to fill Paul's seat.
- Kelley Cunningham, the Director for the Division of Violence and Injury Prevention at DPH, and the DPH representative. Ruth took a moment here to thank Kelley for her service as the chair of this Commission over the last couple of years.
- Kelly Casey, the Managing Director for William James College, Clinical and Forensic Services including interface referral agency.
- Rebekah Caylor, 911 Dispatcher for Raynham and representative of the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association on the Commission.

- Courtney Chelo, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations at the Massachusetts Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and here on behalf of the Children's Mental Health Campaign.
- Rebekah Gewirtz, Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers, the Massachusetts chapter and the Rhode Island chapter, and representing the Massachusetts chapter in her role on this Commission.
- Jill Lack, CEO of Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership working closely with the Behavioral Health Helpline (BHHL) and also expressed her condolences to Eileen.
- Debbie Helms began her introduction by expressing her condolences to Eileen and everybody at Call to Talk, and 988. She is the former director of the Samaritans of Merrimack Valley because she retired one week ago and is working part-time through the transition until the end of September. Debbie will formally connect with Ruth with her notice and transition details.
- Kathy Marchi, CEO and President of Samaritans Inc and Commission representative of the Samaritans and one of the 988 call centers.
- Kimberly Martin, Executive Director of Riverside Community Care Trauma Center and Mass Support Program Representative.
- Ivy Moody, Attorney with Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee representing the Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee.
- Pam Sager, Executive Director of Parent Professional Advocacy League (PPAL) representing PPAL and family voice.
- Pata Suyemoto, Associate Director of Equity for the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention representing people with lived experience.
- Mio Tamanaha, Director of the Behavioral Health Helpline representing the Department of Mental Health.
- Joan Taglieri, Sr. Director of Psychiatry at Cambridge Health Alliance representing the Association for Behavioral Health.
- Monna Wallace, Director of Programs for Mass State 911 Department overseeing the department's academy, all training programs, public education compliance, the Massachusetts Equipment Distribution Program, and the Mass Relay Contract.
- Jacqueline Hubbard, National Alliance and Mental Illness of the Deputy Director of Policy and Communications representing NAMI-Massachusetts.
- Charmain Jackman, Doctor, Founder and CEO at InnoPysch focusing on BIPOC mental health and well-being representing the NAACP Boston Chapter, a national association for colored people.

Staff Member Introductions:

- Justin Sheng, Office of General Counsel, Legal Counsel for DPH
- Brian Dupre, Office of General Counsel, provides legal support to the Bureau of Community Health and Prevention.
- Brenda-Liz Velez, with the Commissioner's Office supporting Emily Daly, Assistant Commissioner at DPH.
- Casey Hall, Founder of Casey Hall Training Associates supporting a variety of commissions for the Department of Public Health.
- Casey Pratt, Project Manager for Casey Hall Training Associates supporting this commission with meeting minutes, drafting the annual report, and support with meeting agendas and format.

Ruth wrapped up introductions by introducing herself – Ruth Blodgett (with two T's), she/her pronouns. Ruth has been with DPH for 7 years and prior to that was a healthcare executive at Berkshire Health

Systems in Western Mass. Ruth lives in the Berkshires and in her time working in healthcare she has a variety of experiences including running a hospital, running the physician business, and running strategy and marketing and community health work. She has maintained a strong interest in mental health and wellness and integrated health which led her to want to work to keep people healthy. Her current role is Bureau Director for the Bureau of Community Health and Prevention. Ruth was also involved with standing up the 988 service in Massachusetts and noted her familiarity with some of the Commission members. She is glad to be here and glad to take on this role as Chair of the 988 Commission.

Statutory Charge of the Commission

To set the tone for the work ahead, the conversation was directed in a review of the Commission's statutory charge. Ruth highlighted the significance of the first two bullets and read them out loud to the group. Ruth then shared a story from feedback received at one of the call centers about the impact of one of their recent calls. All identifying information had been removed, but the story she could share involved someone in crisis who placed a call to 988. Someone who had never used the service before noticed an advertisement for the number and though they were actively in distress, found the courage to call. The call taker used their training and provided the support and guidance that was needed. The call taker was able to empower the caller to accept help even though they were reluctant to receive it. Once trust and consent were established, 911 was called, and help was provided to the caller. This is a powerful example of the marketing working, the training working, and the critical impact of 988 and 911 working together to support someone in need.

Setting the Stage for FY26/27 Commission Work:

Before moving on to the prioritization discussion, Ruth shared her observations and reflections as the new chair joining this Commission.

- **Expertise** - Ruth acknowledged the vast expertise of the Commission members and remarked on the strength of that and the strength of the different perspectives that are in the room.
- **Statutory Charge** - She noted the broad nature of the statutory charge with the very specific requirement to submit a report by March of each year.
- **Conflict** - She felt it was important to acknowledge that she is aware of the tension in some of the past meetings. Since she believes conflict can be good, she wants to ensure that the Commission has a goal of making conflict constructive. She noted that conflict is good when it helps elaborate and add perspective to a conversation.
- **Impactful Recommendations** - Another observation Ruth shared was on the past work of this Commission, and other Commissions she had participated in. She has found that recommendations tend to be more successful when they are fewer in number and backed by research and substance. As Chair, her goal is to focus on a few recommendations presented with a strong background and rationale. She believes this increases the chance that they will be seen and acted on. Ruth will advocate for this goal so that what the Commission puts forward is more impactful.
- **Timeline Challenges** - Ruth also noted that the timeline the group is working with is challenging. Ruth announced that she is sharing an approach today on how the Commission might organize their work from today's meeting through the submission of the annual report in March 2027, and beyond, so that the group is set up for success in 2027.
- **Exploratory Topics for 2027** - She also let the group know that she is aware of the tabled recommendations from last year and the interest in assessing those items.

Prioritization Discussion and Key Topics

As a matter of priority, Ruth highlighted that 988 has long term sustainability challenges. She is aware that the Commission has voted twice to recommend the user fee, which was not picked up by the legislature this year. Ruth put forward a recommendation that the 988 Commission revisit this again and see if there is anything that can be added to bolster the position that a user fee is necessary. Additional reasons that this is a priority are timing and timeline. The legislature will reconvene in January of 2027, and if/when the user fee does get picked up there is a 3-year lead time for implementation. Ruth asked the group to think about how we can strengthen this recommendation. There is also some strength in the consistency in which the 988 Commission has recommended the implementation of the user fee and there is opportunity to build on that with FY26/27 Annual Report.

Another suggestion Ruth made to the Commission was on how they might further explore the performance of the 988-network, including interoperability. She reminded the group that part of the onboarding back in 2023 involved presentations from the Crisis Services Continuum on their key performance measures, overall status, and functionality. She suggested it is time for a refresh of this information that includes their KPIs so that we can use data to inform and assess if there are recommendations the Commission can derive from that.

On the presentation screen Ruth walked through the remaining scheduled meetings timeline for FY26/27 from August (today) through the February meeting with suggestions on how the 988 Commission could prioritize their time together.

- **August** – open discussion on prioritizing the user fee and sustainability of 988
- **October** – present findings and draft recommendations related to the user fee, update on network presentations.
- **December** – review draft report, Crisis Services Continuum presentations, post meeting survey
- **February** – vote on annual report, review survey results, 2027 planning that highlights findings from network presentations

The next slide showed a Gantt view of today through the end of the year 2027 titled 988 Commission Roadmap. After a review of the proposed roadmap, Ruth opened it up to the 988 Commission for discussion. She asked for feedback on the outlined approach first and then their comments on the user fee.

- Kathy Marchi thanked Ruth and shared that she thinks this has been a great start, and that she likes this plan to focus our efforts on productive outcomes.
- Jill Lack noted this is only her second meeting, but she appreciates the structured approach, and the timeline makes sense to her.
- Charmain Jackman shared that this approach is organized and helpful particularly in terms of the timeline. She highlighted that there were several items that the Commission had planned to come back to this year and wanted to honor that and asked that we think about how we could come back to those topics. The “tabled recommendations” were shared on screen and Ruth suggested that it might be best to come back to that list once we have the landscape overview and KPIs from the crisis services teams. That way we are reviewing the tabled recommendations in the context of where the system is presently at.
- Debbie Helms shared some thoughts, starting with her appreciation for Kelley and thanking her for all her work with the 988 Commission over the years. Without judgement, she raised some issues that she has witnessed with the group’s process and recommends instead that the group follow the review process and minimize derailments – for example, avoid reopening recommendations at the voting

stage. She also recommended the Commission stay focused on its statutory mission and avoid spending time outside the Commission mandate. Reviewing the statutory charge like we did earlier in the meeting might be a useful exercise from time to time.

- Rebekah Gewirtz shared that she appreciates the Gantt view timeline, and she agreed that the plan is good. She added that it would be helpful for commission members to be able to propose agenda items and asked if there could be a format in which we could build this into our meetings. Ruth responded that she would like to use the survey that we develop to get input from the Commission which will inform our agendas. If the results of the survey require a need for the Commission to review and prioritize topics that could happen.

The group moved forward with the discussion on the user fee. Ruth asked for the 988 Commission's thoughts on how they can build upon the previous recommendations to bring it forward again and prepare us for the October meeting.

- Kathy Marchi stated that she doesn't know what the steps are beyond making a recommendation. She asked some open questions… do we need champions, and what are other steps we could have taken? She noted that she finds it hard to believe the legislature doesn't believe it should be funded. She posed the idea on whether there are any relationships or contacts we could leverage.
- Ruth noted that the approach for this conversation is to collect ideas and leveraging relationships is a good call out.
- Kelley Cunningham suggested that we could revisit the presentation that Accenture provided back in FY24/25 and see where we can update the information. She suggested an approach where we show the legislature where the user fee has gained traction at a national level. She suggested emphasizing what may happen if we don't get the fee and how that would impact sustainability. Lastly, she suggested that we might try a personal approach by sharing call center stories which highlight the impact and importance of 988 like the story shared today.
- Debbie Helms suggested showing the financial benefits of the user fee, and how the implementation of which could free up monies that are being used today that could go to other programs that help other aspects of the state. Debbie also suggested that, once the legislature approves the fee, that we market the change proactively before it goes into effect so that no one is surprised and anger it is mitigated over additional charges.
- Eileen Davis asked if there was any feedback from the legislature on why it hasn't been picked up. Her experience is that they are not even aware that there has been a recommendation. Ruth is not aware of any feedback but noted that 1) it is worth gathering intelligence about it, and 2) is there any outreach we can do or support to make the legislature aware. Eileen followed this up with another suggestion that our legislature should know if they are falling behind other states on this front as she believes that Massachusetts takes a lot of pride in being at the forefront of progressive initiatives such as this.

Ruth then redirected the conversation to collect input from the Commission members on the proposed presentations from the Crisis Services Continuum. Ruth offered to take some initial feedback on what those presentations might include and any suggestions for preliminary planning which she will iterate on and bring back to the group in October.

- Pam Sager asked for clarity on the scope of Crisis Services Continuum. Ruth summarized the areas as someone to call, someone to respond, and some place to go, and Kelley Cunningham confirmed that the list is 988, BHHL (Behavioral Health Helpline), MCI (Mobile Crisis Intervention), and the 911 system (ED/Hospital care). Kelley suggested it would be a good exercise to see where we are across this

spectrum 4 years later, how these services interact, what that means from a cost savings perspective, and what are the lessons that have been learned.

- Ivy Moody agreed with Kelley's suggestion and added that it would be useful to also get people working in similar roles across the state in different geographic areas (rural, urban, etc.) so we might get a picture of the full landscape on how needs are being met or not met across the board. Ruth responded that this is a good suggestion and raised that it might require us to adjust our timelines a bit.
- Courtney Chelo suggested that we hear from people that run the call centers particularly in areas of regional diversity to learn more about the impacts of the loss of the press 3 option, the training that has gone into place in its absence, and what the gaps are.
- Ivy Moody remembered that there was a 988-intern working specifically with her college campus, and suggested that if we are approaching regional representation, we might also want to identify groups that work specifically with universities.

The group then pivoted back to the user fee with some reiteration and additional suggestions.

- Debbie Helms reiterated the approach to find out what other states are doing with the user fee highlighting to the legislature that *not passing it* is a missed opportunity to stay at the forefront and that by passing it there would be real positive impacts on the overall budget.
- Kathy Marchi suggested we invite chairs of the Mental Health Committee of the legislature. Those are the people that should be aware of what the centers and the commission are doing, and it would help to bring them along to get the funding/mechanism approved.

Upcoming Meetings and Next steps

This was determined to be a good stopping point, and Ruth directed the conversation to upcoming meetings and next steps.

- Eileen Davis raised her hand and asked if previous meeting resources on the topics discussed today could be shared with her so she could catch up on the 988 Commission's background. Ruth suggested that we might be able to pull together a summary list rather than have Eileen go through all the postings on the website.
- The December 21st meeting will be rescheduled due to the date being very close to the holidays. The February 15th meeting will also be rescheduled because that is the President's Day holiday. Brenda-Liz Velez will send out a doodle poll to the Commission members.
- Ruth will start working on confirming the attendees and presentations for December and will provide an update to the group at the October meeting.

Vote 2 Adjournment

Ruth called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Rebekah Gewirtz made a motion to adjourn, and Jill Lack seconded the motion. The meeting was then adjourned via vote.

The next 988 Commission meeting will be held on October 19th, 2026, from 1:30 PM to 3:00 PM ET.