

# Massachusetts 988 Commission

Meeting Minutes  
9/30/2024  
1:30pm – 3:00pm

Date of meeting: 9/30/2024

Start time: 1:40pm

End time: 3:03pm

Location: Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

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

Chair Cunningham welcomes all attendees and apologized for the delay due to technical difficulties experienced by the commission and called the meeting of the 988 Commission to order.

Informed participants that this meeting is subject to Open Meeting Law. Votes will be conducted via roll call. Commission members should remain muted unless speaking, and the chat feature is not available to the public. Members are encouraged to use the raise hand feature for comments or questions and to state their names before speaking for accurate minutes. Rebecca Ames and Rebecca Gewirtz were asked to use their last initials for clarity in the minutes.

Reported that Gloria Gonzales has left the commission, and efforts are underway to fill her consumer seat. Two additional positions are currently awaiting approval at the Governor's office, including another consumer seat. Suggestions for potential candidates for the consumer seat are welcomed to contact Chair Cunningham or Brenda-liz Velez.

Informed that geo-routing for the 988 service went live on September 17th with Verizon and T-Mobile, and AT&T will join later this fall. This will direct calls to the nearest center based on the caller's current location rather than by area code. For calls from providers other than Verizon and T-Mobile, routing will still utilize area codes.

Also, a summer traffic survey conducted by Vibrant Emotional Health indicated that Massachusetts is not expected to see a significant increase in call volume. Monitoring will continue, particularly as colleges resume sessions.

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 August 15<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes, which was seconded by Sharon Hanson and approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).

Chair Kelley Cunningham addressed the following:

- Joan and Pata were introduced as new members of the commission.
- The meeting will conclude by 3:00 PM to respect everyone's schedules.
- Last month, representatives from a research organization presented findings on surcharges and sustainability for the 988 service.
- The commission is exploring funding mechanisms, particularly around surcharge fees.
- Efforts were made to invite speakers from states using surcharges and those that do not.
- Virginia was unable to present but provided valuable insights during informal discussions. Chair Cunningham and Danielle Bolduc updated the Commission on the discussion.

## Key Insights from state of Virginia:

- Emphasized the need for a legislative champion to support the surcharge fee; Virginia benefited from a supportive state senator.
- Virginia introduced their surcharge alongside a 911 fee increase, which facilitated smoother passage.
- Funding must be specifically allocated for 988 call centers, establishing a trust fund to ensure proper usage.
- Virginia transitioned away from state funding over three years, relying solely on surcharge fees in the current fiscal year.
- The trust fund model has been effective for sustainability.
- Virginia implemented a minimal surcharge of \$0.08 per month for prepaid phones and \$0.12 for other lines, facing no significant opposition due to a larger population providing greater funding.
- The timeline for establishing such funding mechanisms can range from 9 to 18 months, depending on legislative session schedules.

## Next Steps

- The commission is approaching the beginning of a new legislative session; proposals must be prepared promptly to navigate the process effectively.

**Danielle:** Raised concerns about varying fee structures for 911 services across states, noting Massachusetts has a flat fee collected statewide. Shared Accenture's recommendation to maintain this standardized collection.

**Monna:** Confirmed no deviations in fee collection; fees are collected by carriers and sent to relevant authorities.

**Ivy:** Inquired about the impact of transferring calls between helplines (e.g., 988 or 911) on funding. Asked if call transfers affect fee structures or funding discrepancies.

**Kelley:** Clarified that 911 funding is consistent across lines, with a uniform fee for all. Confirmed 988 will follow the same structure.

**Commissioner Doyle:** Discussed funding for other call lines in Massachusetts, explaining they lack direct fees and are funded through alternative sources. Mentioned a flat fee structure similar to 911, pending support from the 988 Commission.

**Charmain:** Representing the NWSBP Boston chapter, expressed gratitude for the helpful meeting notes. Emphasized the importance of equity in service delivery, rather than convenience for providers. Raised concerns about equity and the burden on certain consumers during the parallel process with 911. Suggested considering a tiered fee structure based on income, as discussed in the previous meeting, and cautioned against assuming this will be implemented without proper discussion.

**Kelley:** Acknowledged Charmain's point as an interesting question, noting it has been raised by others. Explained the challenges of implementing an income-based tiered fee system, including difficulties in identifying individuals' incomes and changes in employment status. Mentioned initial research did not yield viable solutions for income-based fees. Responded to Charmain's mention of prepaid versus monthly plans, noting that Virginia uses a similar approach for their 911 service, where fees apply to users of prepaid phones. Agreed to document this for further consideration in upcoming discussions.

**Jennifer:** Inquired about the basis for determining fees—population vs. call volume—and whether discretion in fee amounts would be allowed.

**Danielle:** Explained that the FCC collects data on taxed lines, aiding in understanding demand growth. Suggested a potential fee range of 20 to 25 cents per line based on recent data.

**Sharon:** Restated the importance of a tiered fee structure for equity.

**Rebekah G.:** Expressed concerns about inequities in fee structures and advocated for funding through state taxes rather than surcharges. Suggested exploring amending the existing 911 fund to include 988 funding.

**Commissioner Doyle:** Highlighted challenges in the state budget structure and the need for careful consideration of funding cuts. Stressed the operational costs for call centers and the importance of sustainable funding.

**Paul Mina:** Discussed the long-standing challenges in securing sustainable state funding for 2-1-1 services. Advocated for a steady funding mechanism free from political fluctuations.

**Kathy and Debbie:** Emphasized the need for consistent funding for essential services and investment in technology improvements.

**Rebekah G.:** Suggested advocating for a dedicated funding line for 988 services, emphasizing public support for new tax revenues.

**Danielle:** Acknowledged the challenges of the flat state budget and the importance of flexibility in funding.

**Joan:** Inquired about existing data reviewed by the committee regarding funding sources for the 988 program.

**Courtney:** Requested more time to explore additional funding avenues before finalizing recommendations.

**Rebekah G.:** Suggested including multiple funding options in recommendations to avoid a binary choice.

**Paul:** Emphasized the importance of a single, clear recommendation due to challenges in securing reliable funding.

**Danielle:** Expressed uncertainty about fee structures for different types of lines. Noted that various states have diverse structures for 911 services, including statewide, county, and municipal levels. Mentioned that Massachusetts has a flat fee structure for 911 services, collected at the statewide level. Highlighted a recommendation from Accenture to maintain this standardized collection method to ensure consistency.

**Monna:** Confirmed that there are no deviations in fee collection. Stated that fees are collected by the carrier and provided to the relevant authorities.

**Ivy:** Questioned the implications of calls being transferred between helplines (e.g., from a helpline to 988 or 911). Asked if this affects the funding ("pots of money") for each service. Raised two separate questions:

- Does transferring calls change the fee structure?
- Will there be discrepancies in funding if calls are transferred between different services?

**Kelley:** Clarified that funding for 911 is consistent across all lines; every line contributes the same amount. Confirmed that 988 funding will follow the same structure, with the 988 fee appearing on everyone's monthly bill.

**Commissioner Doyle:** Addressed funding for other call lines in Massachusetts, stating they do not have direct fees for individuals. Explained that these lines are funded through alternative sources, with no assessment fees from carriers or health insurance. Mentioned that any fees charged would be similar to the 911 structure, which is a flat fee applied uniformly across all types of lines, including landlines and cell lines, pending support from the 988 Commission.

**Kelley:** Confirmed Doyle's statement regarding the fee structure.

**Jennifer:** Expressed interest in the Virginia meeting summary, questioning the use of population versus call volume as a basis for determining fees. Inquired if discussions included leaving the fee amount to discretion rather than specifying it in legislation, referencing pending legislation in New Jersey.

**Kelley:** Acknowledged that the discussion on population versus call volume had not occurred. Questioned how to structure fees based on call volume and expressed concern about billing callers for multiple calls.

**Jennifer:** Clarified that her inquiry was about using state population or call volume to determine fees, emphasizing the need for data on which to base fee decisions. Highlighted that high fees could create equity issues and sought to understand the data used to establish fee amounts.

**Danielle:** Explained that the FCC collects data on applicable lines, aiding in understanding the number of taxed lines in Massachusetts (approximately 9 million). Mentioned collaboration with a consultant to assess call demand and growth, noting an increase in call volume in recent months. Addressed the cost considerations related to emerging chat and text modalities, suggesting a potential fee range of 20 to 25 cents per line based on the gathered data.

**Sharon:** Restated the importance of considering a tiered fee structure to address socioeconomic factors and equity issues. Noted that while Virginia has a tiered system due to existing 911 structures, pursuing a similar approach in Massachusetts should still be considered.

**Rebekah G.:** Clarified her position on the funding structure for the program, emphasizing her concerns about disproportionate burdens. Expressed opposition to means testing for fees, arguing it creates inequities and confusion about eligibility. Advocated for funding to be part of state taxes rather than a surcharge, suggesting the creation of a dedicated fund within the state budget similar to the 911 fund. Stressed the importance of equitable funding for critical programs, arguing that a surcharge would not distribute costs fairly. Suggested exploring the possibility of amending the existing 911 fund to include 988 funding as a shared resource. Recommended gauging consensus among participants to determine the best path forward on this issue.

**Kelley:** Clarified that the 911 service charges all callers a flat fee (e.g., \$1.50) to support its operations, suggesting a similar approach for 988.

**Rebekah G.:** Reiterated that adding more fees could hinder access to necessary services, emphasizing the role of taxes in minimizing such fees. Cited Section 35JJ of the Massachusetts General Laws, which pertains to a separate fund for enhanced 911, expressing interest in understanding its relevance and potential for supporting 988 funding. Encouraged creative strategies for funding through taxation rather than relying solely on surcharges.

**Commissioner Doyle:** Reacted to previous comments about funding for 988, highlighting challenges in the current state budget structure. Asked if the commission would advocate for cutting costs elsewhere to fund 988, emphasizing its importance. Mentioned her role on the 911 commission and acknowledged past attempts to reduce the surcharge, which were deemed unsustainable. Stressed the high operating costs for call centers in Massachusetts, noting they function as separate entities with distinct funding. Expressed concern about the potential negative impact on existing services if budget cuts were made to fund 988. Recognized the need to be cautious about how taxes or surcharges may disproportionately affect certain populations. Concluded by emphasizing the lack of a sustainable funding source and expressing appreciation for the opportunity to share his perspective.

**Paul Mina:** Highlighted the challenges of securing sustainable state funding for Massachusetts 2-1-1 over the past 17 years, noting the difficulty in establishing a reliable funding line. Mentioned handling over half a million calls, including mental health and 988 calls, emphasizing the need for consistent funding. Stressed that funding efforts divert focus from the core mission, advocating for a budgetary system free from political fluctuations. Pointed out that many carriers resist implementing fees due to concerns about negative public perception regarding additional costs for consumers. Suggested that once consumers understand the benefits of such fees, acceptance would increase. Advocated for a steady funding mechanism to ensure the program remains operational regardless of state budget constraints. Proposed calculating necessary funding by determining the total amount needed for the program and dividing it by the population to establish a charge.

**Kelley:** Agreed with Paul's approach, noting that while starting with established needs.

**Kathy:** Reiterated support for previous comments regarding equity and the challenges posed by the state budget. Emphasized the importance of funding for essential services that reflect community values. Stressed the need for funding structures to keep pace with demand, noting that current funding levels are insufficient. Highlighted that centers are independently working to fund their services, indicating a need for a more sustainable solution.

**Debbie:** Agreed with Kathy's points, emphasizing the importance of a steady funding stream. Highlighted the necessity of investing in technology improvements (e.g., chat and text services) to enhance service delivery. Noted the need for funding to accommodate growing demand and ensure that call centers can effectively respond to calls. Stressed that answering calls involves more than just staffing, requiring comprehensive funding to support various operational needs.

**Rebekah G.:** Emphasized that budgets reflect societal values and suggested that the commission could advocate for a new line item to support 988 funding without requiring cuts elsewhere. Noted the existence of an \$8 billion rainy day fund and potential revenue from the millionaire's tax, which could help finance mental health services, including 988. Argued that the public would likely support using new tax revenues to enhance mental health services, reinforcing the idea that these services should be accessible without additional charges to consumers. Encouraged creativity in proposing funding solutions and language to support 988. Acknowledged her perspective as one among many, expressing a desire to gauge consensus within the group regarding the direction for funding—whether through a surcharge or other means. Stressed the importance of ensuring that critical programs like 988 are funded equitably through collective taxpayer contributions, similar to other essential services.

**Danielle:** Acknowledged the importance of exploring all options for sustainable funding for the 988 program. Explained the challenges of the state budget process, noting that it has remained flat for several years, limiting responsiveness to growing demand. Emphasized the need for flexibility in funding to meet increasing service expectations and federal requirements. Highlighted the importance of public trust in the service, stressing the need for reliable phone response capabilities.

**Kelley:** Clarified that a flat budget means no annual increase, making it difficult to project funding needs for the following year. Discussed the uncertainty in the budget approval process, which can strain call centers if funding is delayed or inadequate. Stressed the need for a balanced approach to funding that ensures equitable service delivery without jeopardizing existing resources.

**Rebecca A:** Expressed appreciation for Rebecca G's insights and sought clarification on the options available for funding. Highlighted the potential of a cell phone tax as a straightforward funding source but sought to understand other options being considered. Raised questions about the commission's responsibility to recommend specific funding language, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive understanding before any decisions are made.

**Kelley (Response to Rebecca A):** Confirmed that the commission will recommend how best to support the 988 service, potentially including specific language for the funding source. Acknowledged the challenge of balancing differing opinions on funding mechanisms (surcharge vs. state appropriation) and the need for clarity before the next meeting. Agreed with Rebecca A on the importance of ensuring that a funding source is available if a surcharge is not recommended.

**Debbie:** Asked whether implementing a surcharge on phone services would allow for increased flexibility in the state budget by freeing up funds for other purposes. Noted that, while the goal is not to simply collect fees, having a surcharge could prevent the need for future increases or fluctuations in funding. Highlighted that much of the current funding comes from federal grants and suggested that a surcharge could relieve pressure on state resources for other important initiatives.

**Kelley:** Confirmed that implementing a surcharge would indeed free up funds for the state budget.

**Paul:** Shared insights from a recent event with federal and state legislators regarding funding for the 988 program. Mentioned that legislators suggested seeking funding outside the traditional budgetary process due to competition for limited state and federal resources. Emphasized that sustaining funding with minimal consumer impact is crucial and that a small surcharge could be a viable solution to ensure regular funding without constant dependency on governmental support.

**Jennifer:** Agreed with Paul, highlighting that a minimal surcharge (e.g., \$0.25 per month) is a small price to pay for a critical service that benefits underserved communities. Stressed the group's responsibility not only to discuss funding but also to evaluate program implementation and access to services for under-resourced populations.

**Karin:** Echoed the importance of long-term sustainability for the 988 program, suggesting that the focus should be on permanent solutions rather than merely easier short-term fixes. Expressed concern about relying solely on state lawmakers for consistent funding and the potential risk of conflating 988 with 911 services. Highlighted the necessity of appropriate language in funding recommendations to ensure equitable access to services, particularly for those underserved by existing systems. Shared personal experience of the unpredictability of state funding, noting that critical programs can be cut unexpectedly, underscoring the need for reliable funding sources.

**Joan:** Inquired about existing data and resources the committee has reviewed to inform discussions on funding avenues for the 988 program.

**Kelley:** Confirmed that a presentation was given last month detailing costs and data and offered to share it with Joan if she hadn't received it. Mentioned that past discussions also included data on call volumes and other relevant metrics, accessible on the committee's website. Encouraged Joan to review this information to better understand the context of the discussions.

**Joan:** Emphasized the importance of diversifying funding sources, expressing concern about relying on a single funding stream.

**Sharon:** Acknowledged the helpfulness of recent discussions and expressed the need to gauge the committee's direction. Suggested that it's time to decide on the next steps, proposing a vote or another action to clarify how to proceed.

**Kelley:** Suggested an informal vote to gauge committee members' preferences regarding funding options, particularly the surcharge. Conducted a hand raise to see how many members favored a surcharge. Result: 11 members in favor of a surcharge, 6 against. Emphasized the need for further discussion based on the vote outcome.

**Courtney:** Clarified that her silence during the vote did not indicate opposition; she is open to exploring additional options. Expressed the importance of considering equity in the decision-making process. Requested more time to investigate and discuss other funding avenues before finalizing any recommendations.

**Kelley (Response to Courtney):** Acknowledged the need to explore more options and agreed to seek additional information before the next meeting.

**Rebekah G.:** Suggested the possibility of including multiple funding options in the commission's recommendations, which could help alleviate the pressure of a binary vote. Proposed that the recommendation could encompass broader language in the budget to explore both surcharge and non-surcharge options.

**Kelley (Response to Rebekah G.):** Expressed the need to check if the commission is permitted to propose multiple options in their recommendation or if it must be singular.

**Paul:** Questioned the practicality of presenting multiple recommendations, emphasizing that the committee should stand behind a single, clear recommendation. Highlighted the challenge of securing consistent political funding for the program, drawing on his extensive experience in the field. Stressed that, while there are many options to consider, few come with guaranteed funding, and reliance on political processes may not yield reliable financial support.

**Kelley:**

- Announced the next meeting scheduled for **Monday, November 18th**, from **1:30 PM to 3:00 PM**.
- Proposed to review and refine recommendations based on the discussions held so far.
- Aimed to finalize the recommendations for a vote in **January 2025** to ensure they are ready for submission by the **March 1st** deadline.
- Requested feedback from the group on whether they feel prepared to compile the recommendations or if additional information is needed for the November meeting.

**Vote 2 to adjourn:** A motion to adjourn was made by Sharon Hanson and seconded by Courtney Chelo and approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).