

Massachusetts 988 Commission

Meeting Minutes

October 20, 2025

1:30pm – 3:00pm

Date of meeting: Monday, October 20th, 2025

Start time: 1:34 PM

End time: 3:06 PM

Location: Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

Count	Members participating remotely	Vote 1	Vote 2
1	Danielle Bolduc – Director of the Suicide Prevention Program	x	x
2	Patrick Bowlin - Current or former consumer of mental health or substance use disorder supports or services	x	x
3	Kelly Casey, PhD – Department of Forensic & Clinical Services at William James College	-	-
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	Undersecretary Kerry Collins – Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS)	-	-
7	Rebekah Gewirtz – National Association of Social Workers - MA & RI Chapter	x	x
8	Sharon Hanson – Mass. Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP)	x	x
9	Debbie Helms – Samaritans Merrimack Valley	x	x
10	Jessica LaRochelle – Mass. Association for Mental Health (MAMH)	x	x
11	Josh Quirk – 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.	-	-
15	Kimberly Martin – Riverside Trauma Center – Riverside Community Care	x	x
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	Pam Sager – Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL)	x	-
19	Pata Suyemoto - National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association	x	x
20	Joan Taglieri - Cambridge Health Alliance	-	-
21	Mio Tamanaha – Department of Mental Health	x	x
22	Stacy Vail – Cataldo Ambulance Service, Paramedic	-	-
23	Monna Wallace – State 911 Department	x	x
24	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

** **Vote 1:** Roll Call and Minutes Approval; **Vote 2:** To Adjourn Meeting

Call to Order and Opening Remarks:

Chair Kelley Cunningham, Director of the Division of Violence and Injury Prevention at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, introduced herself and mentioned her designee as the Commission Chair. She welcomed the commission members and the attendees and thanked everyone for being here. Kelley opened with some general housekeeping tips reminding the group that the meeting is subject to Open Meeting Law and that any votes taken during the meeting will be conducted via a roll call. Commission members should remain muted unless they are speaking, and to please not use the chat feature as it 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 to record the minutes accurately and encourage accessible communications.

August Meeting Minutes: Kelley called for approval of the draft minutes from the last Commission meeting on August 18th, 2025. Rebekah Gewirtz stated she was marked absent from the August meeting, but she is certain she attended as evidenced in the meeting minutes. Casey Pratt agreed to review the issue offline and resolve any changes needed. Paul Mina introduced a motion to approve the August 18th minutes with the change and Rebekah Caylor seconded the motion.

Vote 1 on approval of the August meeting minutes: The August 18th minutes were approved by roll-call vote.

Commission Update:

Kelley reminded the group that we still have two open positions on the Commission, but that there is now a candidate in place to fill the Consumer seat. They are currently going through the on-boarding process right now, and she is hopeful they will formally join the Commission meeting in December.

Follow up on Interoperability Discussion:

Kelley followed up with the group about a previous discussion on improving interoperability between 988, 911, BHHL, and the mobile crisis line as a potential recommendation. Earlier this month, representatives from each service met to review current coordination efforts. The meeting was positive—warm handoffs are occurring, and stronger connections with the mobile crisis team are developing. Overall, the group agreed that the system is functioning as well as possible given existing constraints and decided there was no recommendation to bring forward at this time.

Members of the Commission expressed concern about that decision, and a lengthy conversation ensued.

- Clarification on the system technology barriers was requested. The barrier to making system changes is that the calls to 988 are routed nationally before they are directed locally in Massachusetts. Vibrant manages the phone technology at the top and the Commission does not have the authority to change the system as it currently operates today.
- Several Commission members expressed concern that the public finds the large number of options confusing. There was general agreement among them to move forward with a recommendation, even if outside the Commission's authority, stating that communities are confused and urging legislators to consider consolidating these options, since the system should reflect the needs of the people who use it.
- Some other members spoke out to say that they don't agree with taking that recommendation forward and that this isn't something we are prepared to recommend at this stage without more evidence that our current system isn't working.
- Other Commission members raised another option which would be to take the idea for this recommendation and put some research and work into it over the next year. A deeper dive into this topic could be a welcome opportunity so that although the recommendation is aspirational, the Commission could land on a more fully formed recommendation backed up by research and potentially supported by examples modeled by other states that have more streamlined processes.

- There were comments noting how far we've come with 988 in recent years and on the separate decision to also move forward with BHHL. There was discussion on some of the current interoperability efforts between 911 and BHHL highlighting the ongoing training that is being conducted with PSAPS and a reminder to the group that the BHHL line is programmed into every single 911 system with one button transfer capability.
- There was some discussion on budget concerns and how streamlining processes and helplines might help mitigate budget constraints.
- On some of these points, Danielle Bolduc shared a couple thoughts with the group: the state made a clear decision to set up the BHHL as a separate service after a very lengthy needs assessment was done, there is an awareness at the secretariat level that there are a lot of helplines, but getting buy-in from people to give them up or consolidate is challenging, and lastly it is important to understand the technical limitations of 988 specifically that it cannot be used to triage additional resources.
- Monna Wallace answered some questions from the Commission members on how some of the warm transfers work reiterating that 911 is equipped to transfer to BHHL. 911 does not transfer to 988, but BHHL can transfer to 988, and 988 can transfer to BHHL. She also clarified that dispatchers for 911 are very careful in their decision to transfer calls. She noted that there are a lot of criteria that need to be met and a lot of training to be able to confidently identify appropriate scenarios for transfer.
- Mio Tamanaha described some of these training efforts noting that these calls go through the regular triage process. One of the PSAPs is a formal partner and they work a lot with them on the workflows, and they review calls together. They are working towards having additional formal partnerships with the PSAPs where BHHL is in their protocol in writing. One important thing to the PSAP community is that the call can also be transferred back to 911.

2025 Recommendations and Report Timeline

Kelley reminded the group that we planned to spend time today reviewing and discussing what we have gathered for recommendations this year because we need to draft the annual report so it can be reviewed in the December meeting. She suggested that if there are recommendations that require more time to work on, we could flag those items as recommendations to pursue in the next year as well as add them to the annual report under a headline for 2026. She shared her screen and presented the recommendations slides. Kelly did an overview of the recommendations to date and then asked the group for their feedback. She reminded the group that each recommendation is voted on, and the vote number counts (approved and opposed) are documented in the annual report.

Draft Recommendations:

1. **Counter cuts at the Federal level:** Conduct a broad assessment of the anticipated or current impacts of Federal funding cuts and make a recommendation for increased resources – funding and staff support indicated. **(April 2025)**
 - Some of this conversation in April was driven by the anticipated removal of the 988 press 3 option for the LGBTQ+ community, which was disabled in July.
 - Jessica LaRoche suggested a recommendation that, considering the removal of the “press 3” option, 988 Massachusetts should convene a meeting with GLAD and the LGBTQ+ Commission to discuss how 988 can better support the LGBTQ+ community. The goal would be to identify specific needs and secure funding to address them, for example, allocating a budget for additional training if that is recommended by these groups. Jessica also proposed that 988 ask questions such as: Do members of this community feel comfortable calling 988? If not, why? And what can we do to support them and mitigate the impact of losing the “press 3” option?
 - There was some frustration expressed that data was not captured for the press 3 option, and therefore it is harder to quantify the loss. Kelley clarified that it was a choice not to collect data because it is confidential data.

- Debbie Helms shared with the group that when option 3 was cut and funding was cut to the Trevor line; she felt the messaging was lacking in that it was almost like there is nothing supporting this community now even though that's not true. Debbie proposed a recommendation for the necessary funding to make additional training a requirement for call centers to shore up more support for the LGBTQ+ community. Samaritans of Merrimack Valley developed a training to strengthen their support of the LGBTQ+ community, but we don't know if other call centers are also doing this.
 - Courtney Chelo shared that what is happening at the federal level is alarming, but also what is happening in Massachusetts is alarming pointing out that Fenway recently made the decision to discontinue care for trans youth. Coordination and collaboration with LGBTQ+ youth commission, or PFLAG is a worthwhile pursuit. She raised fears that some call takers with religious backgrounds use this connection with people in crisis to recruit, she expressed wariness of the Samaritans.
 - Danielle Bolduc clarified with the Commission that despite the name Samaritans, it is not a religious-based organization.
2. **Include budget for 988 text capability:** Funding currently comes from the federal budget, however with surcharge approval, text could be covered. **(April 2025)**
 - It has since been stated that the surcharge will cover phone text and chat. We may not need to include this in the recommendations.
 - No further comments were made by the commission on this recommendation.
 3. **Expand our 988-marketing campaign to Asian language communities:** Argus has conducted an initial research study focused on the Chinese community. Under consideration to progress further but capacity issues need to be addressed. Capacity issues were defined as not wanting to advertise something we don't have the capacity to serve with the right cultural competencies. **(June 2025)**
 - No comments were made by the Commission on this recommendation.
 4. **Increase marketing initiatives in western Mass:** Argus mentioned that Springfield is one of their geographic targets. There is a concentration of billboards and posters in this area and rural areas of western mass since the original campaign, and digital tactics cover statewide. It was noted that western has some of the highest rates of suicide in the state. **(June 2025)**
 - No comments were made by the Commission on this recommendation.
 5. **Advance legislation that prohibits anyone from using AI to provide mental health and therapeutic decision making. Provide support to advance this bill and potentially an outline of where AI is and is not an appropriate use of technology:** Massachusetts is aware of similar initiatives in other states. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is working with the Massachusetts Mental Health Coalition to file a bill in Massachusetts. The filing timing is a challenge because we are in the middle of a 2-year session, but the groups are looking into the logistics of advancing this bill in the middle of this session. If anyone is interested in working on advancing the bill with NASW please reach out to Rebekah Gewirtz. The recommendation would emphasize that AI does not replace human interactions or act in any capacity of a provider of 988 services. **(August 2025)**
 - Ivy Moody requested information on AI and how AI is being used today.
 - No further comments were made by the Commission on this recommendation.

Other Discussion Points:

Ivy Moody put forward a recommendation that we recommend the surcharge again this year because the status of the bill is unclear. Kelley agreed that reinforcing that we should go forward with the surcharge could be another recommendation.

Courtney Chelo reminded the Commission that she put forward a recommendation a couple months ago that wasn't captured in the deck. The recommendation is that it become more standard practice that every caller who calls 988 is offered a warm handoff to BHHL by the end of the call. Short of making the recommendation a requirement, she recommends increased training to make these handoffs happen more often and the likelihood that people who call 988 get additional on-going support.

Ivy Moody let the group know that she wanted more time to draft some more recommendations and inquired about sending an email to the Commission members with her recommendations for the annual report ahead of the next meeting. Casey Hall reminded the group that this would be a violation of Open Meeting Law which the 988 Commission is obligated to abide by. Recommendations must be made in this open public forum.

Ivy Moody put forward a recommendation for data reporting requirements. Specifically, data collection on feedback from people using the 988 service, and data on interoperability and the warm transfers. She may have other recommendations for data to put forward. Kelley suggested parking this one as a recommendation we could spend more time on and put forward in next year's report.

Paul Mina reminded the Commission that Mass 211 Call to Talk is a 988-call center, and by call volume, it is the largest. After what he heard on the call he wanted the Commission to understand and remember this.

Several members raised concerns that we don't have enough time to review the recommendations or discuss additional recommendations. A suggestion was made to have an additional meeting in November on November 17th. Kelley asked for a show of hands to see if there was enough consensus for this proposal because without quorum we cannot do it. Brenda-Liz Velez will send an email to get commitment from the Commission members to meet quorum.

Kelley wants the Commission laser focused on finalizing the recommendations. She reminded the Commission of the timeline we've committed to with the review of the annual report scheduled for December 15th and the final vote for the annual report in February.

Paul Mina reminded the Commission that a change to our timeline requires a vote. Kelley pushed back to say that it's after 3 PM and we have yet to determine if we can have a meeting on November 17th because we don't know if we'll have quorum.

There were a lot of audio problems on the call. Almost everyone had issues.

Kelley asked for a motion to move us forward to close out the meeting today with the caveats that Brenda-Liz will begin working on the November 17th date and reaching out to members to find out if we will meet quorum, and Casey will capture what was raised today for additional recommendations.

Next Steps

Brenda-Liz will work on scheduling a November 17th meeting and reach out to members to get their commitment to attend ensuring we will meet quorum.

Casey Pratt will capture additional recommendations raised today and start drafting some aspects of the annual report.

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