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NAMI California
1851 Heritage Lane #
150
Sacramento, CA 95815
916-567-0163

March 22, 2021

The Honorable Rebecca Bauer-Kahan
California Assembly Member
California State Capitol, Room 2130
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 988 (Bauer-Kahan): Miles Hall Lifeline Act – SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member Bauer-Kahan:

On behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness - California (NAMI-CA), I am writing to express support of AB 988, The Miles Hall Lifeline Act. AB 988 establishes the “9-8-8” emergency response system for Californians experiencing a mental health crisis.

NAMI-CA is the statewide affiliate of the country’s largest mental health advocacy organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Our over 110,000 active advocates and 62 affiliates include many people living with serious mental illnesses, their families, and supporters. NAMI-CA advocates on their behalf, providing education and support to its members and the broader community.

In 2020, the federal government established “988” as the new three-digit number for mental health crisis hotlines. At the national level, NAMI played a critical role in the federal 988 legislation and mobilized grassroots support to ensure its passage. Once implemented in California, 988 will connect callers with around-the-clock intervention, including mobile crisis support teams staffed by mental health professionals and trained peers. Mental health crisis services and alternatives to calling 911 can be an effective alternative to a law enforcement response, provide an opportunity to effectively co-respond with mental health-law enforcement teams, and divert people with mental illness away from criminal justice system involvement.

NAMI has a long history of partnering with law enforcement, including directly training first responders and promoting standards of justice system policies and practices to make their encounters with people in a mental health crisis effective and safe. NAMI and its national partners have developed many resources to support local communities to start or enhance their crisis intervention programs with first responders. In California, NAMI-CA spearheaded legislation to improve required training for law enforcement, emergency dispatchers, and other first responders. At the local level, many of our 62 affiliate NAMI-CA chapters work hand-in-hand with local law enforcement and community mental health providers to reduce arrests of our loved ones and address racial justice challenges. As you know, the Contra Costa County NAMI-CA affiliate has partnered closely with the Miles Hall Foundation, a co-sponsor of the bill, to host events and spur local changes to law enforcement responses to people in a mental health crisis and their family members.

While establishing 988 will surely help California make important strides in crisis care, NAMI-CA urges the Legislature to attend to the gaps in California’s community mental health continuum that must be filled for 988 to fulfill its promise. The



NAMI California

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individuals answering 988 calls must have an array of local crisis response interventions and services available to respond to their callers.

The current mental health crisis response system relies on law enforcement and puts people suffering from mental illness through an expensive and traumatizing revolving-door as they shuttle between jails, emergency rooms, and the street. A comprehensive crisis response system can prevent these tragedies, save money, and increase access to appropriate care. Establishing 988 is an important first step and must be accompanied by new statewide investments that repair holes in community safety nets. Mental health crisis stabilization and urgent care centers, mobile outreach teams, and crisis residential services should be accessible in every community of our state; today, sadly, this array of care is not available to all who need it.

NAMI-CA is pleased to support AB 988 and hopes its path through the legislative process will highlight the need for further investment in mental health crisis support services in California. I may be reached at jessica@namica.org or (916) 567-0163 with any questions you may have. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jessica Cruz, MPA/HS
Chief Executive Officer