

Legislative Issues



Federal HELP Act

SUPPORT THE FEDERAL HELP ACT OF 2026 (HUMAN-SERVICES EMERGENCY LOGISTICS PROGRAM ACT)

- Sponsors:
 - House: Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA-1) and Rep. Morgan McGarvey (D-KY-3)

FUNDING REQUEST

- **Total Project or Program Cost** - Not Applicable
- **Requested Amount for Project or Program** - Not Applicable

REQUESTED STATUTORY CHANGE

- **Policy Type** - Federal Grant Program Expansion and Support
- **Statute** - Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. § 300dd-1 et seq.)
- **Proposed Language Change** - Amend the Public Health Service Act to authorize grant funding for infrastructure, staffing, and system improvements for 2-1-1 information and referral systems and the 9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

ISSUE SUMMARY

- The HELP Act would strengthen and modernize the 2-1-1 and 9-8-8 hotline systems, which provide vital mental health, crisis, and human service referrals to millions of Americans.
- With increased demand for behavioral health and support services, the bill ensures call centers can meet the need through sustainable funding, infrastructure improvements, and workforce development.

FULL DETAILED BACKGROUND

- 2-1-1 is a 24/7 free, confidential service that connects individuals to local resources such as food, housing, child care, and disaster assistance. 9-8-8 is the national Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offering behavioral health crisis response and suicide prevention.
- Both systems are seeing growing demand. Since 2020, 2-1-1 call volume surged with pandemic-related needs, and 9-8-8 handled over 5 million contacts in its first year alone.
- Despite this, many call centers lack adequate resources, staffing, and technology to meet the full needs of their

communities.

- The HELP Act (H.R. 3498/S. 1729) authorizes grants to:
 - Expand workforce capacity and training
 - Improve technology, data systems, and call routing infrastructure
 - Strengthen coordination between local crisis response and human service providers
 - Enhance outreach and equity in access to services
- This legislation ensures consistent federal investment in these essential systems, improving access, responsiveness, and impact.
- The Senate companion bill (S. 1729) shows bipartisan, bicameral support and was introduced by Sens. Bob Casey (D-PA) and Jerry Moran (R-KS).
- Endorsing organizations include:
 - United Way Worldwide
 - Vibrant Emotional Health (administrator of 9-8-8)
 - National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
 - Mental Health America
 - National Council for Mental Wellbeing
 - Crisis Response Network.

BENEFITS/EXPECTED OUTCOME

- Strengthens the national infrastructure for mental health and crisis response.
- Supports local call centers' ability to meet increasing demand with adequate staffing and tools.
- Enhances coordination between emergency response and community-based services.
- Saves lives by reducing response time, improving outcomes, and increasing service continuity.

POINT OF CONTACT

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