



MIKE ROHRKASTE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 55TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 938

Relating to: grants to the Center for Suicide Awareness, Inc.

Testimony of State Representative Mike Rohrkaste

Assembly Committee on Mental Health

February 19, 2018

Thank you, Chair Tittl and members of the Assembly Committee on Mental Health, for holding this public hearing.

As many of you may know, the suicide rate is increasing across the nation and here in Wisconsin. According to the Department of Health Services, over 700 Wisconsinites commit suicide each year, with approximately 5,500 additional individuals hospitalized due to intentional, self-inflicted wounds. Suicide affects all groups of people and can exact a devastating toll on not only the individual, but family, friends, and loved ones.

Currently, there are resources available to individuals who need additional support. HOPELINE, which is operated by the Center for Suicide Awareness, is one of these resources. This service provides immediate emotional support and resources for individuals experiencing a crisis and is available 24/7. HOPELINE serves every county in Wisconsin at no cost to the individual. In addition to providing immediate assistance, HOPELINE captures valuable, accurate data in real time. The data collected can be used in the planning and deployment of state and county resources and can be particularly useful in rural and underserved urban areas which struggle with access to resources.

Assembly Bill 938 requires the Department of Public Instruction to provide \$110,000 annually to the Center for Suicide Awareness, Inc., to continue their work in assisting those who may need emotional support or additional resources. This funding will allow the Center for Suicide Awareness to continue the great work they are doing throughout the state and will help to ensure that struggling individuals have resources available.

Thank you for your time, and I encourage members of the committee to support Assembly Bill 938.



JIM STEINEKE

MAJORITY LEADER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 5th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Toll-Free: (888) 534-0005
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P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

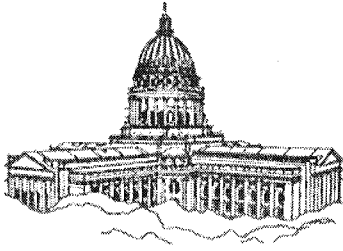
To: Chairman Tittl and members of the Assembly Committee on Mental Health
From: Representative Jim Steineke, 5th Assembly District
Date: February 19, 2018
Re: 2017 Assembly Bill 938

Chairman Tittl and members, I thank you for hearing Assembly Bill 938, which grants \$110,000 in both Fiscal Years 2017-18 and 2018-19 to the Center for Suicide Awareness for the purpose of funding staff, training, and expenses for a text-based suicide prevention service.

I am very proud that I represent the district that contains the Center for Suicide Awareness. They offer support for groups of all ages for those who have lost a loved one to suicide, those who have attempted suicide, and for family members. They also offer presentations for schools to help students cope with suicide and to know the warning signs. They also offer training for educators, healthcare professionals, police, and others. With regards to the bill before us today, they also operate HOPELINE, a statewide text-in service for emotional support and resources.

It is an unfortunate fact that over 700 of our fellow Wisconsinites commit suicide each year. Suicide affects everyone. Suicide and attempted suicide are devastating events, and the grief they cause family, friends, and loved ones can be unbearable.

HOPELINE provides 24/7 support through a text-messaging service. This could be especially helpful in reaching young people, who are more likely to send a text than make a phone call. They have done outstanding work so far in counties all across Wisconsin, helping people deal with breakups, job loss, bullying, school issues, and other struggles. I am so grateful for the work they do in the 5th District and around the state. I ask that you join this bipartisan group of authors in recommending additional funding to support their wonderful program.



LENA C. TAYLOR

Wisconsin State Senator • 4th District

HERE TO SERVE YOU!

**Testimony of State Senator Lena C. Taylor
Assembly Committee on Mental Health
Assembly Bill 938
February 19, 2018**

Good afternoon, Chairman Tittl and committee members. I would like to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding Assembly Bill 938, relating to grants to the Center for Suicide Awareness.

The Center for Suicide Awareness currently operates HOPELINE, a 24/7, 365 days a year suicide prevention resource for individuals in need. HOPELINE serves every county in the state and provides support to individuals at no-cost to them. During the 2017 biannual state budget process, I learned that the state provides no financial assistance to fund HOPELINE. As a member of the Joint Committee on Finance, I offered, in an omnibus motion, to fund HOPELINE. While that motion was rejected, this bipartisan bill is a continuation of our efforts to address and prevent suicide. This bill would require the Department of Public Instruction to provide \$110,000 annually to the Center for Suicide Awareness to operate HOPELINE.

Suicide affects all of our communities, however, it has disproportionate effects on young adults, children, and veterans. In Wisconsin, veterans accounted for 19 percent of all adult suicides in the state between 2007 and 2011. In addition, Wisconsin's suicide rate among 15- to 19-year-olds has been higher than the national rate for all but one year between 1999 and 2015, and the rate has doubled between 2007 and 2015 according to the Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health (OCMH). To address suicide, we need to reduce barriers. HOPELINE, as a 24/7 anonymous resource, allows individuals to overcome stigma and receive services when they are needed.

In addition to HOPELINE's service to communities state-wide, HOPELINE captures and collects detailed data. This data tracks the peak times when texts are received and the topics that users are most likely to contact HOPELINE about. The data further details veteran status and age range. This data can help researchers and officials efficiently deploy resources. Data is especially important for underserved areas and rural communities who face resource and geographical barriers.

Chairman Tittl and committee members, I ask for your support of Assembly Bill 938. It is critical that we fund resources to address suicide. The legislation has broad bipartisan support and is supported by mental health advocacy organizations across the state, including Disability Rights Wisconsin, Mental Health America of Wisconsin, National Alliance on Mental Illness Wisconsin, and Wisconsin Family Ties. Thank you for your time and attention.

Senator Lena C. Taylor
4th Senate District

**"What lies
behind us
and what
lies before
us are tiny
matters
compared
to what lies
within us."**

Ralph Waldo Emerson

CONTACT US:

920-475-4748

centerforsuicideawareness.org
316 East 14th St. Kaukauna, WI



**VETERANS
AND MILITARY
SUPPORT**

DIAPERS FOR VETERANS

The Center is partnered with Jake's Diapers to provide Veterans who are financially struggling to meet their family's diaper needs.



CHALLENGE COINS

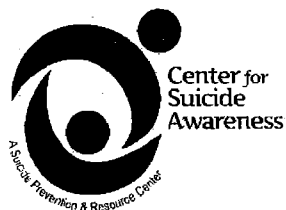
The Challenge Coin Project is an idea that The Center came up with after talking with Veterans who were trying to cope with all that they went through in their tours while serving our country. They created and produced a challenge coin to honor Veterans and give them a resource through their HOPELINE. The Center for Suicide Awareness provides support groups for Veterans, many who have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or suicidal thoughts. We support them and their families at no charge.

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-8255**



**TEXT
"HOPELINE"
TO 741741**





I CHALLENGE YOU TO 22

In 2012, the Department of Veteran's Affairs reported the number of Veteran deaths by suicide at 22 a day. The VA's report sparked a movement of Veteran suicide awareness using the number 22, helping thousands of Veterans across the United States. In 2014, the VA completed a new analysis with considerably more data and have updated the average of Veteran deaths by suicide to 20 each and every day. In 2015, The Center for Suicide Awareness, with the help of local Veterans, created and produced a "Challenge Coin" to honor Veterans, encourage them to talk about their struggles, and get the help they need. There are now over 20,000 Veteran Challenge coins in circulation!

Now, we are continuing our effort by distributing Veteran Challenge coins to organizations, like law enforcement and first responders, to give to Veterans they meet that would benefit from our 24/7 support text line: HOPELINE. But we need your help. Please consider sponsoring an organization with 22 (or more) Veterans.

To learn more and to participate in the Challenge, please visit our website:
CENTERFORSUICIDEAWARENESS.ORG



Everyone...

Needs someone to talk to...

We've been hurt.

We've been angry.

We've been there.

We got help.

It worked.

Let us help you.

Text: "hopeline"

To: 741741



P.S.

It's free 24/7.



Whatever it is... it matters.

We've been hurt.

We've been angry.

We've been there.

We've been helped.

Text: "hopeline"

To: 741741

It is free.

24/7



Center for
Suicide
Awareness

“r u OK?”

“u r not alone.”

HOPELINE

Text: “hopeline”

To: 741741



Center for
Suicide
Awareness

A Suicide Prevention & Resource Center

Suicide Warning Signs

These signs may mean someone is at risk for suicide. Risk is greater if a behavior is new or has increased and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

- ❖ Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself.
- ❖ Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as researching online or buying a gun.
- ❖ Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- ❖ Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain.
- ❖ Talking about being a burden to others.
- ❖ Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs.
- ❖ Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly.
- ❖ Sleeping too little or too much.
- ❖ Withdrawing or feeling isolated.

5 Coping Strategies

Express yourself in writing

Postcard, music

Circle of friends

Service

Text "HOPELINE"
to 741741

FREE 24/7 Emotional Support
Text Based Service

Need someone to listen
Having a bad day
Need resources

The Center For Suicide Awareness

IN CASE NOBODY
TODAY YOU ARE GOOD
ENOUGH.



ABOUT US

The Center for Suicide Awareness is a 501(c)3 nonprofit whose mission is to prevent suicide by education, awareness, and direct services. We are dedicated to reduce the stigma surrounding the issues of Mental Health, AODA, Veterans, and Suicide.

We are located at:
316 East 14th Street,
Kaukauna, WI 54130
(920) 475-4748

OUR SERVICES & EDUCATION

- Suicide Prevention
- AODA
- Coping Skills
- Addiction
- QPR
- Stigma Reduction,
- ACT
- Stress Management
- Grief and Bereavement
- Suicide Post-Venton
- Art Recovery
- Veteran Services
- Honest, Open, and Proud
- EMDR
- Brain spotting

EVENTS

Annual Walk for Suicide Awareness
Annual Ride for Suicide Awareness



SUPPORT GROUPS

Survivors of Suicide
Adult and Youth
Hope After an Attempt
Adult
Veterans and Families
AA and HA

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

For a free appointment,
please email the following:

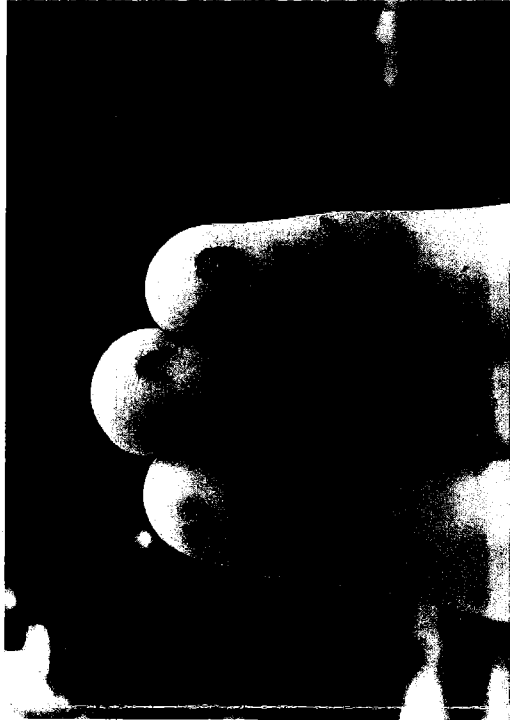
Barb Bigalke: Suicide Prevention
barb@centerforsuicideawareness.org
Scott Granger: AODA
scott@centerforsuicideawareness.org

CONNECT WITH US:

<http://www.centerforsuicideawareness.org/>



Center for
Suicide
Awareness



Center for Suicide Awareness
centerforsuicideawareness.org



The **Center for Suicide Awareness** is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit headquartered in Kaukauna, Wisconsin. In 2010 Barb Bigalke founded the Center and serves as the Executive Director. The Center for Suicide Awareness is dedicated to preventing suicide through proactive education, training, emotional support, collaboration, and intervention.

The vision of the Center is compassionate, readily accessible, barrier free and sustained support for any individual or entity in need, while free of any mental health stigma. The Center for Suicide Awareness brings help, hope, and resources to families and individuals in our communities through programs that reach others where they are at and when they need it most. Of the many Center programs and initiatives, bringing HOPELINE to all of Wisconsin, has given individuals across our state free emotional support anytime, from anywhere by simply texting: HOPELINE to 741741.

Since October of 2014, HOPELINE has been providing suicide prevention through direct emotional support to youth and adults when the person needs it most. The person is able to text in their concern to a trained, compassionate, responder and receives confidential support, help, and resources. Most often, the texts received reflect struggles with breakups, job loss, bullying, school, friends, relationship issues, family struggles, LGBTQ issues, abuse concerns, and concerns from Veterans and service men and woman.

In addition to HOPELINE, the Center is proactive in the fight against Veteran Suicides. Every day approximately 22 Veterans die by suicide in the US. Veterans and service men and women deserve our help and support. As a result, the Center began the "I Challenge You to 22" program with all efforts focused on getting a Challenge Coin in the hands of a Veteran that is struggling. The Center produced a Challenge Coin reflecting messages of hope, support, and encouragement to share their struggle. The Challenge Coin also has the number for HOPELINE. Today, Police Departments across the Wisconsin are equipping their Officers with Challenge Coins to share with any Veteran that is struggling.

The prevalence of mental health stigma continues to be a significant concern. Mental health stigma produces harmful attitudes and behaviors towards those struggling with a mental health concern. Stigma often prevents individuals from seeking help and may prevent family, friends, or loved ones from reaching out. Anyone struggling with a mental health concern must be treated with the same respect, compassion, and dignity as those who are struggling with physical health. The Center for Suicide Awareness is in the "business" of saving lives. The focus will continue to be our mission of being

dedicated to preventing suicide through proactive education, training, emotional support, collaboration, and intervention.

PROGRAMS

HOPELINE:

HOPELINE is a no-cost, barrier-free emotional support **text-based** service providing immediate emotional support, help, and resources to anyone, 24/7, via the most popular form of communication: texting. This free service, offered by Center for Suicide Awareness, receives texts from anyone seeking support, help, and resources when they need it most. Text **HOPELINE to 741741** from anywhere, at any time and a live, trained, Responder promptly answers the text. The Responder establishes rapport and trust via back and forth texts with the individual. Both work together to move the person from a “hot moment” to a “cool calm” and establish a plan to **stay safe**.

I CHALLENGE YOU to 22

Every day approximately 22 Veterans die by suicide in the US. These brave men and woman deserve our help and support in preventing one more veteran from taking their life. As a result, the Center began The “I Challenge You to 22” program with all efforts focused on getting a Challenge Coin in the hands of a veteran that is struggling. Just a quick background of what a Challenge is: if you are a veteran or service man or woman, you know that a Challenge Coin is a physical symbol given and exchanged to show membership into the armed services, to enhance morale, and to build camaraderie. In addition, they are also collected by service members around the world. The Center produced a Challenge Coin with messages of hope and support along with encouragement to share their personal story. Also, printed directly on the Challenge Coin is HOPELINE, the Centers’ text based 24/7 emotional support service remaining veterans that hope, help, and support is just a text away. To-date, over 50 Police departments across our communities are giving these Challenge Coins are given by Police Officers to any Veteran that they encounter that is in of help and support.

PROJECT REST

Project Rest, started by the Center for Suicide Awareness, reaches out to all with the powerful visual “rest” symbol in music. In music, the REST symbol is a place where the musician pauses in the middle of the song to breathe, refocus, and refresh before they continue.

In life, there are ups and downs, twists and turns, and we can easily become stressed and overwhelmed. With the barrage of life issues we face daily, take a moment and simply rest. PROJECT REST serves to encourage and remind us to take a moment just to pause, breathe, refocus, and refresh. In music as in life, the song continues as so must we.

ANNUAL “WALK for SUICIDE AWARENESS” and “RIDE to END SUICIDE”

Above are two of the many suicide awareness and prevention events that the Center has developed and holds annually. With hundreds of people participating, these events effectively raise awareness within the communities where they are held as well as bring together anyone affected by the tragedy of suicide. These events are filled with support for one another, resources, and powerful keynote speakers who bring incredible stories of perseverance and hope.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, PRESENTATIONS, PANEL DISCUSSION LEADERS

Year round, the Center for Suicide Awareness offers and conducts suicide prevention training, presentations, and panel discussions to:

- Schools – all grades
- Colleges
- Community organizations
- Community events
- Businesses
- Law Enforcement

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS

- SOS Groups (Survivors of Suicide)
- Veterans Support Program for the Incarcerated
- And more....

**Assembly Committee on Mental Health
February 19, 2018**

Statement in Support of Assembly Bill 938

Thank you Chairman Tittl and members of the Assembly Committee on Mental Health for hearing Assembly Bill 938 (AB 938). The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) strongly supports this proposal and the additional resources being allocated to suicide prevention services.

AB 938 requires DPI to annually provide a grant to the Center for Suicide Awareness, Inc. The purpose of the grant is to provide funding for staff, training, and expenses related to operating a text-based suicide prevention service. In each of the 2017-18 and 2018-19 fiscal years, the amount of the grant to the Center for Suicide Awareness, Inc., is \$110,000. This requirement for DPI to disburse the grant funds could be easily absorbed with in the current operations of the department.

A text-based suicide prevention service will help support our youth because:

- Teens text more often than make phone calls, a text line provides them with a familiar medium in which to obtain support.
- The proposed text-based suicide prevention service would be available to all kids, families, and educators in Wisconsin.
- Mental health professionals point out that texting reduces the stigma associated with asking for mental health help.

Providing a text-based suicide prevention service aligns with DPI mission and vision to keep our kids healthy, safe, supported, and encouraged in school every day. The additional resources will help grow mental health supports for kids across all parts of the state.

The DPI would like to thank the bipartisan group of authors for their efforts to provide increased mental health supports for Wisconsin's children.



UNITED TO GROW FAMILY AGRICULTURE

February 19, 2018

Dear Members of the Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Mental Health,

According to a December 2017 article in The Guardian entitled, “Why are America's farmers killing themselves in record numbers?”, a study, last year, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found people working in agriculture – including farmers, farm laborers, ranchers, fishers, and lumber harvesters – take their lives at a rate higher than any other occupation. Data suggested the suicide rate for agricultural workers in 17 states was nearly five times higher compared with that in the general population.

After the study was released, Newsweek reported that the suicide death rate for farmers was more than double that of military veterans. This, however, could be an underestimate, as the data collected skipped several major agricultural states, including Iowa.

The US farmer suicide crisis echoes a much larger farmer suicide crisis happening globally: an Australian farmer dies by suicide every four days; in the UK, one farmer a week takes his or her own life; in France, one farmer dies by suicide every two days; in India, more than 270,000 farmers have died by suicide since 1995.

A wrecking ball for rural America, the 1980s farm crisis was the worst agricultural economic crisis since the Great Depression. Market prices crashed, loans were called in, and interest rates doubled overnight. Farmers were forced to liquidate their operations and many were evicted from their land. There were fights at grain elevators, shootings in local banks, and the suicide rate soared. I am sorry to report similar issues are arising across farm country, today, and the projected outlook is dim.

At our annual convention held earlier this month, Wisconsin Farmers Union members passed a Special Order of Business regarding Prevention of Agricultural Worker Suicide. Key points include:

According to a Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy report (2015), “individuals aged 45-54 were at greatest risk of dying by suicide, and nearly four out of five persons who died by suicide were male, while approximately three out of five patients hospitalized for self-inflicted injury were women. Physical health and job problems were life stressors involved in 23% and 21% of suicides with known causes.

Wisconsin Farmers Union supports the full funding of the Farm and Ranch Stress Relief Network on the federal level, and all similar programs that support suicide prevention.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important issue, and thank you for beginning to address it with this legislation.

Nick Levendofsky
Government Relations Associate
Wisconsin Farmers Union
nickl@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
(608 234-3741)

**Testimony on AB938
Assembly Committee on Mental Health; Feb. 19, 2018
Shel Gross, Director of Public Policy
Mental Health America of Wisconsin**

Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) began contracting with the Center for Suicide Awareness (CSA) in February 2014 to develop the Hopeline texting service. This was done through the use of carry-over funds from the second Garrett Lee Smith (GLS) Youth Suicide Prevention grant which we were awarded in 2012 on behalf of the State of Wisconsin. The use of the funds for this purpose was strongly supported by our contract manager at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration because she recognized the huge potential in utilizing texting to provide support to teens and young adults, the target population for the grant. Hopeline began operating part-time in October 2014 and subsequently expanded to 24/7 operation.

MHA continued to support Hopeline through April 2016 when the GLS grant ended. Quite frankly, although I have continued to work with Barb Bigalke, the Executive Director of CSA, I'm still not quite sure how she has managed to keep this going. MHA has looked at other grant possibilities and included Hopeline in some grant applications that were not funded. I can tell you this: there is tremendous support for Hopeline across the state. One of my roles is as the Chair of the Steering Committee for Prevent Suicide Wisconsin (PSW)—a public/private partnership of people in Wisconsin dedicated to reducing suicides in our state. PSW does not take positions on legislation, but I can relay that we have had many discussions about how to support Hopeline. I have included a letter from Prevent Suicide Greater Milwaukee that speaks to the importance of Hopeline to local coalitions. Barb Moser, Chair of PSGM, says this about parents who attend trainings she does on suicide prevention:

...my training participants tell me about their kids who are so depressed they can't function, their kids who are losing friends to suicide and drug overdose, their kids they worry will attempt suicide themselves.

I have also included a letter of support from the Wisconsin Council on Mental Health, the Governor's mental health advisory council. They point out the following:

Our youth are in crisis:

- In 2016 Wisconsin had the highest number and rate of suicides among 10-19 year olds since at least 2005 (we don't have comparable information prior to that date).
- According to the National Survey of Drug Use and Health Wisconsin has the 4th highest rate of youth with severe major depressive disorder—11.5% of our young people.
- The WI Office of Children's Mental Health reports that self-harm rates have increased, particularly for Wisconsin females age 15-19.

AB938 will provide much needed stable funding for this valuable service so their staff can focus on the important work of saving lives. I urge you to support this bill.

Scott Walker
Governor



Mishelle O'Shasky
Chair

Karen Iverson Riggers
Vice-Chair

Inshirah Farhoud
Second Vice-Chair

State of Wisconsin

Wisconsin Council on Mental Health
mhc.wisconsin.gov

To: Assembly Committee on Mental Health

From: Wisconsin Council on Mental Health, Mishelle O'Shasky, Chair

Date: February 19, 2018

Subject: AB938

The Wisconsin Council on Mental Health (WCMH) is the statutorily-authorized, Governor-appointed mental health advisory council for the State of Wisconsin. State statutes authorize the WCMH to advise the Governor, Legislature and state agencies on mental health policy and funding. It is in this capacity that we are providing this letter.

At its meeting of January 17, 2018 the WCMH voted to support legislation that will provide funding to the Center for Suicide Awareness in order to support operation of Hopeline, a social-emotional support texting service that is affiliated with the national 741741 Crisis Text Lines. Hopeline utilizes highly trained volunteers, many of whom are in social work and counseling programs in Wisconsin, to respond to texts. Hopeline is recognized by suicide prevention advocates across Wisconsin as a valuable part of the continuum of response to suicidality. It is promoted by many school districts and local suicide prevention coalitions. The WCMH's support of Hopeline is consistent with one of our strategic priorities: suicide prevention.

Hopeline provides a unique service for young people. Interestingly one of the highest text times is the noon hour when kids are having lunch. What other service allows youth to reach out for support while at school and while maintaining this type of confidentiality?

Our youth are in crisis:

- In 2016 Wisconsin had the highest number and rate of suicides among 10-19 year olds since at least 2005 (we don't have comparable information prior to that date).
- According to the National Survey of Drug Use and Health Wisconsin has the 4th highest rate of youth with severe major depressive disorder—11.5% of our young people.
- The WI Office of Children's Mental Health reports that self-harm rates have increased, particularly for Wisconsin females age 15-19.

Hopeline was able to begin operations through funding from the Garrett Lee Smith youth suicide prevention grant administered by Mental Health America of Wisconsin. But since that grant ended it has struggled to maintain stable funding. AB938 will assure that this important piece of Wisconsin's suicide prevention infrastructure remains viable going forward. We urge your support for the bill. Thank you.

prevent suicide

GREATER MILWAUKEE (PSGM)

Coming Together: Action, Hope, Recovery

www.preventsuicidemke.com

2/16/18

RE: LRB 5169 Wisconsin Hopeline Funding Bill

In my roles as the current chair of the Prevent Suicide Greater Milwaukee Coalition (PSGM), a board-certified family practice physician, a member of the executive board of WISE (WI Initiative for Stigma Elimination), a member of REDgen (youth suicide prevention through resiliency), and as a citizen of Milwaukee County and the State of Wisconsin, I encourage the Wisconsin legislature to seize this opportunity to give Wisconsin ongoing access to hope-through one of the best crisis intervention/suicide prevention resources we can offer to our young folks, the **Wisconsin Hopeline**, our Crisis Text Line.

As chair of PSGM, I am all too familiar with the ongoing emotional crises experienced by Wisconsin youth. Data demonstrates increasing rates of youth suicide attempts and deaths.

I see these statistics come alive in the stories of youth crisis I hear almost every day from PSGM Coalition partners, area K-12 teachers and administrators, parents, and from youth themselves. As one of the most active suicide prevention gatekeeper (QPR-Question, Persuade, Refer) trainers in metro Milwaukee, **my training participants tell me about their kids who are so depressed they can't function, their kids who are losing friends to suicide and drug overdose, their kids they worry will attempt suicide themselves.**

I need to be able to give these folks hope in the form of competent and proven resources-and the Wisconsin Hopeline is just that. Youth communicate by texting, and the Hopeline makes competent crisis and suicide intervention services accessible by texting-Hopeline connects youth to the services they need.

Please take action to provide the Wisconsin Hopeline with a stable source of funding, and ensure that my suicide prevention colleagues and I will continue to pass on this excellent resource for hope and help to those we serve.

I sincerely thank you for your consideration.

If I can provide any further information or clarification, please contact me at [414-520-5107](tel:414-520-5107) or barbara@preventsuicidemke.com.

Most sincerely,



Barbara Moser, MD
Chair, Prevent Suicide Greater Milwaukee Coalition
5365 N. Lake Dr.
Whitefish Bay, WI 53217

Testimony from a HOPELINE Volunteer, 2/19/18

As a volunteer crisis counselor for HOPELINE (through Crisis Text Line), I'm actively responding to texts four hours per week. I have two shifts a week that are each two hours. I started my 34 hour training in late January 2017 and became an official volunteer on February 15, 2017.

I have lost three people in my life to suicide, one being a close friend in high school. On the night Arie died, she texted her friends. To this day, I still don't know what exactly she said to each of them, but I wonder if they had known that Arie wasn't in a good place that night.. if they had known the signs of suicide.. if they had known what to say and who to go to for help.. maybe we could have prevented her death. It's not healthy to continue asking "what if" almost 8 years after Arie's passing; however, we do now have resources for many of those "if"s today through HOPELINE:

Volunteers are providing crisis counseling via texting 24/7, 365: We're trained to recognize the signs of suicide and assess our texters for imminent risk. Even when there seems to not always be a "right" thing to say, we are trained to know the best things and the most helpful things to say to get folks through a crisis. I volunteer with HOPELINE to be that person on the other side of a screen who just might be able to save someone's life.

Many folks who text in know objectively that they can get through whatever it is they're going through, but, due to shame, stigma, lack of resources, time of day they experience their "crisis" etc., they need a little extra help. Volunteers are instructed to try and limit a conversation to 45 minutes because crises tend to be relatively brief. Sometimes, that's not always the case and we need to flag our supervisors to dispatch crisis teams should the texter present imminent risk. Issues texters deal with include: suicidal thoughts, depression, addiction, self-harm, anxiety, abuse, relationship and family problems, and anything else someone considers a crisis

HOPELINE provides a safety net for folks who otherwise might not have access to a support system. It's not a replacement for in-person therapy or other types of mental health services; rather, it's an incredibly valuable addition to, or an interim service for, those resources.

Just this morning on my two-hour shift, I texted with two individuals who reported suicidal thoughts. Both were experiencing the thoughts for various reasons and I used our ladder-up risk assessment to ask if they had a plan, had access to means, and had chosen a time to end their lives. They did not, so we continued exploring those thoughts and making plans to keep them safe. We brainstormed coping methods, talked about who is on their team, and what things keep them going. After my conversations with those two ended, I received a text from a mom who was concerned about her son because of a message he sent to his friend. Fortunately, the friend trusted the mom enough to include her on what was happening. I supported the mom throughout the process, making sure a friend went to visit the son and asking her how she was doing.

HOPELINE gives folks that type of free, immediate, and authentic support they need to get through life's toughest moments. This service is invaluable and could very well mean the difference between life and death for someone. HOPELINE is a huge part of a safety net for Wisconsin that cannot be replaced.

Thank you.

REMEMEBERING AMANDA REILLY

Thank you to all here today for listening to our daughter, Amanda, story of struggle and life.

Who remembers where you were when a family member or co-worker, neighbor told you they had cancer or other serious illness?

Who remembers where you were on Monday, October 15, 2007 at 11:30pm?

My wife, Pam, and I were in the bedroom of our 26 year old daughter Amanda where she had taken her life by suicide. The how and where are not important...they why still is there. She looked so cold and all alone on that cold, rainy, windy night.

Amanda is not a STATISTIC...she is our daughter.

She was born on a sunny, bright, Sunday March 29, 1981. She is our third child with an older brother, Brad; an older sister, Melissa; a younger brother, Eric. Amanda has 3 grandpas, 2 grandmas, 19 aunts and uncles, and 22 cousins.

At 9 months old she needed surgery to correct the premature hardening of her skull "soft spot". This condition was causing her skull to shape like a football and would cause health issues. Pam stayed with her day and night. The surgery removed a 1x6 inch section of her skull. Years later she regretted we didn't have the removed bone as it would have been a great "show and tell" for school she thought.

Amanda's middle school years were starting to show her writing talent. One story involved a time I was stopped for speeding with Amanda and Melissa in the car. They were laughing and asking the patrolman if that "is a REAL gun?"

Her high school years were some dark years both emotionally and physically.

After graduation, I helped her buy a car but the real pride came when she bought her own first car on her own.

A week after 9/11/2001 Amanda went with me to take Eric back to UW Madison. A month later to the day she would try to take her life the first time. She planned the incident so that her friends Jenny and Julia would find her in time.

Amanda loved camping, hiking, berry picking in WI and MN. She had many hats and loved her cat, Chee. Fall was her favorite time of the year.

In the summer of 2005 Pam, Amanda, and I were camping in Minnesota when I was stopped for speeding on one of our excursions. It happened to be roughly the same place as the prior year. I tried to explain to the sheriff that I thought the problem was with the speedometer. Amanda started laughing and chirped "Is that all the better you can do, Dad?". The sheriff smiled and gave me only a warning. I think he figured I was going to get more than my share of grief from Amanda and Pam.

Fall of 2006 Amanda enrolled in Fox Valley Tech. She was so proud.

Late fall of 2007 she stopped over and asked if she could finish mowing for me. She was always caring and generous.

Amanda worked the overnight shift for a very large retailer. It was physically and depressing work but she did it. Her boyfriend, Darien, and her were having issues but she loved him. Her talent for writing kept creeping in. One piece was titled.."When I was 7, I wanted to be a dentist".

The writings showed the DARKNESS within the paragraphs. She could put on the MASK or put on the FACE to get through work or family or friends but the fight with the DARKNESS never completely left.

Amanda tried to fight the depression through medication from doctors, sometimes overlapping. She was seen by mental health experts but she knew the answers to the questions. The lack of insurance coverage she needed was not available due to cost or availability. The lack of QUALITY and QUANTITY of mental health professionals exists yet today.

She really tried to fight off the DARKNESS but it overtook her for the last time October 15, 2007.

Medical "fixes" like a gall bladder attack are easy
Mental health "fixes" like depression are not so easy

Every 1 minute a daughter, son, spouse, neighbor, co-worker, grandpa attempts to take their life by suicide
Every 15 minutes a daughter, son, spouse, neighbor, co-worker, grandma succeeds in taking their life by suicide

REMEMBER, 14 don't succeed....they survive to deal with another day
The 1 who does take their life leaves survivors to deal with another day without them...REMEMBERING

As survivors, we need to mitigate the DISEASE of DEPRESSION as it relates to suicide....
Look at the GREAT work the Center for Suicide Awareness started and continues throughout Wisconsin
Q P R training
Support groups
"Hope" text line

REMEMBER...
A hug, a touch, a kind tone, may have given that person....spouse, son, daughter, co-worker 15 more minutes with you.
Even if is only another minute more...it is worth it!

Thanks for your time and attention.
John Reilly

Hello,

My name is Mike Crum, I am the Veterans Education and Outreach Coordinator for The Center for Suicide Awareness. I hold a master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Wisconsin Green Bay and have been in my position for the last 2 years.

I would like to Thank the committee members for this opportunity today to speak on behalf of the Center for Suicide Awareness and The Hopeline.

General McArthur once stated, "The Soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the Soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war." Scars are like Trauma. With the veteran population their scars are in the form of Post Traumatic Stress, Depression, Anxiety, Moral Injury, Military Sexual, Trauma, Suicidal Ideation, and many other things that reminds the servicemember or veteran, or spouse of those wounds.

According to the 2014 Burden of Suicide Report, since 2007 over 700 Wisconsin Veterans have died by suicide, last year alone there was approximately 136, so it is safe to say that over the last 10 years we have lost well over 1,000 veterans and service members to Suicide.

Over the last week there has been many discussions about Mental Health. Talking about how we can provide better services, out reach and intervention to individuals who may be struggling with mental health trauma and diagnosable disorders. At this moment people are in all kinds of crisis. Where do they turn when they need someone to talk to? Where do they turn when they need someone to listen without judgement? Where do they turn when there is no one else to turn to? They turn to texting. According to CrisisTrends.org over 65 million crisis texts have been sent since August of 2013.

Wisconsin is unique in that we have a crisis text line that serves a myriad of topics and people in our state. The Hopeline is an innovative way to serve Wisconsin Residents in ways that traditional mental health services cannot. Being a free service, a person in crisis does not have to worry about a bill, they don't have to worry about losing minutes, and don't have to worry about someone telling them their time is up and they will see you next week. They don't have to deal with wait times, or scheduling conflicts.

The Textline is confidential and gives people a sense of comfort where they can talk to someone without necessarily disclosing who they are. This is a huge factor especially with service members currently serving who may have a mental health trauma but are afraid of losing security clearances or reporting to their commands because of stigma and judgement.

As part of my internship I worked with Barb and Lynne to create our Challenge Coin, in the military Challenge coins are a way to share stories, to network, and a brag a little. When we created the coins we didn't realize the far reaching impact they would have. From veteran to veteran when I give the coin and tell a veteran they are not alone, it turns into a good cry session, or a big hug and we have this instant connection. I tell them if they ever need anything to text The HOPELINE, the fact they realize they have someone to talk to and share their story with is a sigh of relief. We've partnered with Law Enforcement agencies to provide the coins for veterans in crisis.

When I tell servicemembers, veterans, spouses and community providers about The Hopeline there is this sigh of relief on their face, a deep breath and a thank you. In the world of Social Work we know that we can't be there 24/7 we worry about our clients, we stay up late thinking about if they are going to make it until the next day and next day, we put in all the resources, effort services we can but still worry that when they feel no one is there, is when they'll complete a suicide.

This is why a service like The Hopeline is so valuable, someone is always there to listen, someone is always there to help, provide a resource and talk them through whatever it is they may be struggling with.

Last year Arkansas became the first state to fully fund a crisis line through their Department of Public Health. Montana's Governor recently signed a Bill granting 1 Million Dollars for Suicide Prevention, New York, and Illinois have also progressive Suicide Prevention programs.

Our state motto is Forward.

It is time we are forward with Mental Health, forward in our thinking of how to provide mental health services and crisis intervention in the State of Wisconsin, we can be the Forward leading state in utilizing data collected on reducing suicides for teens, youth, veterans, and elderly, it would be an opportunity to reach into rural areas that are hard to reach with traditional mental health services.

It is time we are Forward in our advancement of crisis intervention and Suicide Prevention. By providing this funding we will be forward and progressive and be able to continue to save lives and reduce the stigma around suicide.

HOPELINE TESTIMONY – February 19, 2018

I am Barb Bigalke, the Founder and Executive Director, for The Center for Suicide Awareness. Prior to this, I worked for the Menasha Police Department in the role of operating the Department of Justice Victim Crisis Response Team. I also sit on the Critical Incident Stress Management team for Manitowoc County, the Wisconsin Initiative for Stigma Elimination Advisory Board, and the Board of Directors for the North Eastern Wisconsin Victim Crisis Response Team. One theme from my career of working with people and mental health is meeting them in their environment is crucial to steps toward recovery. Thank you for taking the time to review Bill 938.

The **Center for Suicide Awareness** is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit headquartered in Kaukauna, Wisconsin. The Center for Suicide Awareness is dedicated to preventing suicide and taking the stigma away from mental health.

The Center for Suicide Awareness brings help, hope, and resources to our communities through programs that reach others where they are at and when they need it most. Of the many Center programs and initiatives, bringing HOPELINE, a text based emotional support line, to all of Wisconsin, has given individuals across our state free emotional support anytime, from anywhere by simply texting: HOPELINE to 741741. HOPELINE is not a suicide hotline – but provides a wider range of support services including suicide prevention.

Since October of 2014, HOPELINE has been providing direct support to youth and adults. The person is able to text in their concern to a trained, compassionate, responder and receives support and resources. The texts received reflect struggles with breakups, job loss, bullying, school, friends, relationship issues, family struggles, substance abuse concerns, and concerns from Veterans and service men and woman.

The Center is proactive in the fight against Veteran Suicides. As a result, the Center began the “I Challenge You to 22” program with all efforts focused on getting a Challenge Coin in the hands of a Veteran that is struggling. The Center, with the help of a high school friend who knows the metal plating business and supports Veterans, produced a Challenge Coin reflecting a message of support and has the number for HOPELINE. Today, Police Departments across Wisconsin are equipping their Officers with Challenge Coins to share with any Veteran that is struggling. One officer stated “I came across a Veteran who was struggling with their mental health and was not listening to my instructions. The situation could have quickly escalated. The Veteran was in a bad state and I handed them one of the Challenge Coins. They began to cry and accepted the help we could offer them. That night I went home to my family and a Veteran received help. Blessings. “

HOPELINE - HOW IT WORKS

Text HOPELINE at 741741 from anywhere, at any time and a live, trained Responder promptly answers the text. The Responder establishes rapport and trust via back and forth texts with the individual. Both work together to move the person from a “hot moment” to a “cool calm”.

One tavern owner stated: “One of my customers just lost his job at 52. I was worried about him and handed him one of our HOPELINE glasses and card. I saw him later in the evening texting. He came to pay his bill and asked if you could pay for the HOPELINE glass. I told him it is my treat. He thanked me. He has returned several times. I guess I need more glasses! “

The topics of the texts include a wide variety of situations or feelings. These include:

- Self-harm
- Depression
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Suicidal thoughts
- Substance Abuse
- LBTGQ
- Grief
- Physical/Sexual Abuse
- Bullying
- Relationship issues
- Loneliness/Isolation
- Eating Disorders
- Unsafe/Unhealthy relationships

HOPELINE- HOW IT'S COST EFFECTIVELY IMPACTING WISCONSIN

In 2016/2017, 47 lives in Wisconsin were actively rescued as a result of texting to HOPELINE. The life-saving impact of HOPELINE was shared during a recent event where HOPELINE was featured. A Wisconsin mother and father recognized the HOPELINE materials being handed out to program participants. They proceeded to share with staff their personal experience with HOPELINE. They told how their daughter had started her substance overdose. Their daughter texted HOPELINE and the Responder was able to quickly establish rapport with her and call Emergency Services while continuing to text with their daughter. Their daughter is alive today and HOPELINE was there when she needed it most. *As the parent stated: “This is one victory against the epidemic of opioids and one blessing as I did not bury my daughter.”*

HOPELINE serves as an extremely cost-effective approach to providing all Wisconsin residents with emotional support and resources via text. In rural and underserved areas of Wisconsin HOPELINE has made access to emotional support and resources available immediately. Operational expenses are extremely low for a state-wide program that serves all ages, all genders, and all socio-economic levels.

One student stated: "I use the HOPELINE as my help in between my therapy appointments. My mom said we can only get to see my therapist 4 times a year due to dad's insurance and the drive. I like that I know you are there. I Snap chat the HOPELINE to my friends too when they are down. "

HOPELINE is a Viable Resource that organizations can use and are using daily. HOPELINE is in every one of the districts you represent as an elected official.

Every mental health hospital in our State has HOPELINE as part of their safety and discharge packet. You will find HOPELINE materials in schools, athletic agencies, faith-based, and health and human service agencies across our State, including organizations such as: VA, Children's Hospital, NAMI, Marshfield Clinic, UW Education system, Froedtert, Rogers Memorial Hospital, Opioid Recovery Centers, Catalpa, Mental Health America, Prevent Suicide Wisconsin, Lutheran Social Services, Family Services, 5 Stones Sex Trafficking, to corporations like Land's End, Sauk City Public Health, Watertown High School, City of Brookfield Police and High School, to multitudes of mental health providers.

One HOPELINE user who got the resource from their doctor stated: "That day life was too hard. I grabbed razors and every single pill I could find and walked to the nearest bridge. If one didn't kill me the other would. I was texting the HOPELINE while walking. Life had beaten me down. HOPELINE lifted me back up. You got me help when I couldn't see the light. I am alive because of you."

VALUABLE DATA COLLECTION

The unique and valuable data collected by HOPELINE plays a vital role in identifying mental health concerns throughout the state. Data captured provides a more targeted approach to identifying mental health priorities and trends on a daily basis. As a result, more strategic deployment of limited local and state resources is made. The HOPELINE has received thousands of texts from every county in our State. Our data has shown unforeseen results in times, days, and topics discussed amongst our residents. For example we have watched that Tuesday is the day of the week the HOPELINE is utilized the most – this is how accurate the data is to helping guide next steps.

HOPELINE – WHY IT WORKS

Voice-based support phone lines have been a tremendous help in providing support. Today, however, the mode of communication is shifting and texting is now the preferred mode of communication by millions. For Wisconsin youth HOPELINE has provided them the ability to text at the moment when support is needed: at school, when they are with friends or in situations where they would otherwise be uncomfortable or unable to use a voice-based support line.

One school stated: "I am a counselor for 4 rural schools and simply cannot meet all the needs of my students. When I am not in my office I make sure the HOPELINE is available to my students so they can use it in my absence. I am relieved to know that the resource is there when I am not."

The use of texting by adults has also correspondingly increased the adult population's texts to HOPELINE. Our Wisconsin Veteran population is using HOPELINE to receive emotional support and resources when they need it most.

HOPELINE is:

- Barrier-free and at no cost to the user
- Accessible from anywhere, at anytime
- The only text-based emotional support service that is used by all ages, all genders and at every socioeconomic level
- There is no time limit or number of times a user can utilize the HOPELINE.

Our State Crisis Network often refers a caller to the HOPELINE to continue the conversation.

HOPELINE – SERVICE MUST CONTINUE in WISCONSIN

HOPELINE cannot continue to serve the residents of Wisconsin without State funding. The residents of the Wisconsin deserve barrier-free and immediate access to this critical and lifesaving service.

The Center for Suicide Awareness has done the ground breaking hard work in researching how to bring a text support line to our State – to planning it – putting together the initial software license fee to get it off the ground – to staffing it – to implement it - to promoting it — to managing it. This innovative initiative was done in a few years, with two paid staff members who both had salaries of under \$40,000 and no benefits, with funding from small grants, good people, and rolling up our sleeves for donations and countless volunteers who put their helping hands in the form of time

because it is the right thing to do for our mental health of our State. HOPELINE is at the ground level reaching people where they are. I am not marketing major, I grew up the youngest of 11 in Milwaukee that you just do it if it needs to be done, I am mom and grandma and we are all Wisconsinites, and I still use Google maps to get to our Capital building. But I do know if you give a solid resource to people in their environment where they are most comfortable and do not charge them ---you can save a life. Now we are respectfully asking this committee to provide the next level of funding to cultivate it to a more robust service and staffing. Last month First Lady Walker presented me with Wisconsin Hero Award and to glean from her words: Why is this funding issue and shouldn't Mental health be a non-partisan issue. I wholeheartedly agree. It is time to put mental health into the front seat. Instead of reactive outrage let's be proactive and productive. Let's be cost conscience with our State's hard earned dollars and put funding at the ground level. The hard work we have done has paved the path for next steps in mental health. Bottom line - This resource works. It is cost effective and it makes sense.

The funding received will provide The Center for Suicide Awareness to increase the staffing and training for Outreach to keep current with the demand. Funding will allow us to continue to upgrade the software requirements and to stay current with technology. It will also allow us to continue to support and expand awareness to groups, organizations and places we have not yet reached. It is time to move from let's think if this works – but rather – it works – let's move it forward.

Thank you for your time and encourage you to endorse Bill 938.

HOPELINE Testimony

Wisconsin State Capitol – February 19, 2018

Good afternoon, my name is Chris Groeschel and I am a police officer in Wisconsin assigned to patrol duties. In addition to patrol duties, I am a member of the Crisis Intervention Team, known as a C.I.T. officer with training in mental health de-escalation skills. I was contacted by Center for Suicide Awareness Director, Barb Bigalke, to speak on behalf of the law enforcement community regarding law enforcement and spreading the word about HOPELINE, but due to the projected bad weather, I am unable to present and Barb was willing to share my experience of HOPELINE with you.

As police officers, we are dispatched to a variety of calls for service which include welfare checks, disturbances and suspicious situations. Many of these types of calls include persons with mental health concerns whom may be having troubles on said day or possible having a mental health crisis. During our contact, we are observing non-verbal body language and asking questions to evaluate the person to determine level of crisis is present.

After conducting the assessment, we determine if criteria is present for an emergency detention by law enforcement officer under Chapter 51 of state statutes, or is the person not meeting the criteria to be taken into custody. Either way, officers discuss resources with the person to help them deal with crisis situations, suicidal ideations or troublesome issue which may lead to either crisis or suicidal situations. Our goal is to assist the person in creating the best quality of life as possible for the given circumstance which they have presented to them.

One of the resources we provide is the text line being presented to you today. Most people we talk with do not want to talk face to face, or even over the telephone about issues causing them to be depressed, suicidal or wanting to harm themselves. I have noticed most people have less issues texting someone whom they wish to express their feelings. Society appears to show ease in venting frustrations, expressing their opinions and informing others through written communication. Therefore, texting HOPELINE to 741741 appears to be an easier way to confide in someone about troubling issues. If you look around in public view, you will see people of all ages engaged in communication with their electronic devices. Many of the calls for welfare checks stem from someone texting a friend or relative or posting something on social media which causes concern to others. As you can see, providing someone the HOPELINE information allows them the opportunity to seek assistance in a troubling time of life when they do not want to verbally speak with someone about their problems.

When the HOPELINE card, mental health brochure or poster with HOPELINE information is presented to a person in need, this allows them the sense of helping themselves if they text the resource. The person is informed of the HOPELINE being confidential, trained staff 24/7 and easy to use no matter what age you are. I have explained most phones have the assisting app which helps convert your speech into the words of text to allow you send the messages quicker than typing. Nobody in a crisis situation wants a cumbersome way of communicating, as this would cause frustration and intensify the crisis they are going through, and this would include talking verbally with someone. Texting someone allows you to get your words to them, rather than being interrupted while talking face to face or over the phone.

The texting allows a person with a hearing impairment to utilize the HOPELINE and receive the same nonjudgmental assistance as everyone else.

Many of the people whom I have provided HOPELINE information have mentioned they have seen the posters either at public places or in their schools. I have seen HOPELINE mentioned on social media, and even a post on Facebook from my sister-in-law from Georgia providing a message stating to text HOPELINE to 741741 if you are feeling suicidal. This post made me smile and believe the message is spreading nationwide to help others get the confidential assistance.

I have handed out the HOPELINE information so many times that I have lost count. When Barb began contacting law enforcement agencies and providing the HOPELINE posters, business cards and brochures, I immediately began distributing the resource as fast as I could. I began hanging up the posters at my agency, placed the HOPELINE information into the mental health brochure the officers hand out and I began spreading the word of mouth about this program. I had faith in the text line when it first came out, and I continue to have faith in this program.

When I began giving out the cards, I would explain the HOPELINE to a person whom is troubled and see them take a deep breath. I believe this is when they realized there are people who care and are willing to help someone they do not even know. I have spoken to those who have been crying, which may have been for hours before my contact, and watched their eyes dry up when I explain HOPELINE to them. They looked at me with a sense of relief of someone to confide in, when they do not want to talk to friends or family about their issues. Many people feel like a burden to family and friends, and when they realize the person on the other end of the texting only wants to help them and not judge them. These people seem to appreciate someone is there for them 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

In conclusion, I have spoken to many about the HOPELINE and firmly believe this is one of the best resources someone has in a crisis situation when they are thinking about harming themselves or taking their lives. No one wants to feel alone when they are in a time of need and the HOPELINE give someone a sense of "HOPE" that someone is out there willing to listen and assist, walk them through their troubles or contact proper resources to get them the help they desperately need to stay alive. With this being said, the HOPELINE is going to continue to grow and be utilized on a daily, hourly or even minute by minute basis to ensure someone who is seeking help can see the sunrise on the next day and know they have taken the first step in trying to improve their quality of life. I believe everyone deserves the best quality of life, even if you have a mental illness or not, and HOPELINE is the first step when you no longer feel your life is of the quality you want. Do you feel the same way?

Thank you for your time and consideration of a well deserving lifeline which may one day be a resource for someone you know and care about.

Sincerely,

Christopher F. Groeschel