

SB0003, Unfavorable, Svetlana Shargorodskaya, January 18, 2022

Currently, people call 988 expecting confidentiality and privacy. Some callers are surprised when cops break down the door, handcuff them, and haul them off to involuntary psychiatric hospitalization.

988 refers less than two percent of calls to 911. However, because of the huge call volume, that means hundreds of thousands of nonconsensual interventions. Some researchers believe that this humiliating and disempowering experience causes trauma that actually increases the person's chance of committing suicide later on.

What's the alternative? It's crisis lines such as BlackLine, Trans Lifeline, and Samaritans, who have a policy of zero nonconsensual intervention, never forwarding the call to 911.

Fordham University suicidology professor Emily Krebs says, QUOTE While this approach may indeed result in some callers' deaths, I believe that it will allow many more people to call without fear—and will ultimately save more lives while honoring people's autonomy. UNQUOTE

Some people are especially unsafe in an encounter with the authorities, being a trans person, queer person, person of color, undocumented immigrant, or disabled person. But no matter who you are, when you feel blue and want someone to talk to, you don't want to risk getting locked up.

Journalist Rob Wipond reports that the government contractor administering 988, an organization called Vibrant, demands that its participating call centers covertly trace many calls. Vibrant's guidelines, revised on December 27, 2022, state that dispatching emergency services is always an option for the call center workers. Furthermore, Vibrant has made clear its desire to prevent all other crisis lines from receiving calls or related state funding—endangering the survival of any community-based crisis lines that are truly confidential.

Instead of more funding for the coercive framework of 988, please allocate this money to crisis lines that respect the callers' privacy and ultimately help more people survive their emotional crisis.