



**Testimony of
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CTIA**

Colorado Senate Bill 21-154

**Before the
Colorado Senate Finance Committee**

April 28, 2021

On behalf of CTIA®, the trade association for the wireless communications industry, thank you for the opportunity to raise concerns with Senate Bill 21-154. CTIA and its member companies support the designation of 988 as the three-digit dial for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. CTIA member companies are committed to implementing network changes to ensure Americans can dial 988 when in crisis.

CTIA and its members also understand the importance of a workable state 988 funding framework that includes 988 fees, state appropriations, and federal funds. CTIA is concerned that the current version of the bill does not limit the funding from the fee. The 988 fee should be limited to funding equipment, communications services, and direct costs for crisis hotline center personnel for 988 call taking and appropriate call routing.

The 988 effort has been analogized to 911. 911 fees fund Public Safety Answering Points for call taking and routing; 911 fees do not fund police, fire, or EMS. Funding for the response (police, fire, and EMS) comes from general revenue. Likewise, the 988 fee should fund the crisis centers for call taking and routing. The 988 fee should not fund the response



(mobile crisis support teams, intervention and stabilization services, outreach teams, follow-up services, etc.). Funding for the response (mobile crisis teams, stabilization, outreach, etc.) should come from general revenue.

In addition, the 988 fee should be kept as low as possible, justified by data showing exactly what the fee will fund, and set by the legislature. These types of fees are highly regressive. When cell phones are the gateway to the internet for many Colorado residents, overburdening consumers with more taxes and fees may detrimentally affect their continued connectivity. Amending the bill to limit the scope of the 988 fee's funding and keeping the fee as low as possible justified by spending data will ensure Colorado wireless consumer taxes and fees are kept within reason, particularly because Colorado wireless consumers already pay on average close to 22 percent of their cell phone bills in government taxes and fees.

On page two, lines 15-21, subsection (g), the findings state that the 988 surcharge would generate less than \$100 million in the first five years of implementation. However, according to the April 5 fiscal note on the bill, 5.8 million subscriber lines would be subject to the fee along with 712,000 retail prepaid wireless transactions. At the maximum capped rate of 30 cents per line per month and 30 cents per prepaid retail transaction, the fee would generate \$23.5 million annually, which would exceed the five-year, \$100 million threshold for voter approval. To ensure that the fee does not exceed the cap, the committee may want to consider lowering the cap to 25 cents per line and per retail transaction. This would generate \$19.5 million annually, a figure that will grow over the next five years due to Colorado's



population growth.

In closing, we welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsors to address these concerns. The wireless industry looks forward to the successful implementation of 988 to help our fellow Americans in crisis. Thank you for your consideration.



It is a strategic priority of Colorado Christian University to impact our culture in support of traditional family values, sanctity of life, compassion for the poor, Biblical View of human nature, limited government, personal freedom, free markets, natural law, original intent of the Constitution, Western civilization. The Centennial Institute at Colorado Christian University engages public policy in an effort to advance these principles.

The Centennial Institute is supporting SB21-154 and respectfully requests a “YES” vote.

The bill replaces the current crisis response hotline in the Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) with the 988 crisis hotline. By July 1, 2022, the OBH must contract with a nonprofit to create the 988 crisis hotline center to provide intervention services and crisis care coordination.

With Colorado’s suicide rate being one of the highest in the nation, it is important to provide care and services for those who need it. The creation of a crisis hotline allows for easy access to immediate help, takes steps towards destigmatizing suicidal struggles, and can provide a sense of practical hope to those who are having suicidal thoughts.

The Centennial Institute at Colorado Christian University is sensitive to the mental health struggles of our young people and those in our community and supports this bill as an effective way to provide resources and services to those most vulnerable.

Thank you for your time, thank you for your service, and thank you for your consideration.

Jeff Hunt

Director
Centennial Institute