

# 988 Lifeline – Changes Needed

AN APPEAL TO CRISIS LINE VOLUNTEERS, WORKERS AND ADVOCATES

*Crisis lines must honor respect for persons, including consent,  
and must protect persons from being exploited  
during vulnerable moments and afterwards.*

## 1. Unwanted Cops – Involuntary Emergency Intervention Policy.

Calling or texting 988 should not lead to police being sent without explicit consent. Police can be dangerous, especially for persons who are Black, Brown, Indigenous, Trans, Queer, LGB, Disabled, lacking resources, not fluent in English, or without paperwork. Family members, children may be nearby. If someone is transported to a hospital, they may not be able to afford the bill, and may be involuntarily held. The 988 service can't possibly know the circumstances well enough to risk sending police.

Also see: <https://translifeline.org/safe-hotlines/> , <https://www.callblackline.com/resources>, <https://www.endingpoliceviolence.com/> (referenced via Call Blackline: “Evidence-Based Strategy #5: Invest in community-based mental healthcare...Bolstering the community-based mental health care system includes investing in community-based, non-police responses to mental health crises,...”).

## 2. Data Use, Lack of Protections.

We need restrictions on data storage and use to protect the conversations, the caller, and the person answering. Nonprofit corporations such as Crisis Text Line & The Trevor Project save conversations and perform “machine learning” on the words. For-profit corporations are conducting research, trying to use computer programs to analyze the emotional state of callers. There will be pressure to incorporate “AI” into crisis lines.

Big Data and technology companies are developing services to connect a person's use of a crisis line to other medical and health facilities. This raises many concerns about consent, privacy, data security, third parties, and data brokers. With the promise of funding for 988, these technology companies are positioning themselves for money, data, and “AI” products. Crisis Text Line has 9 million crisis conversations saved so far.

Consent for using words as data is not possible during a crisis. De-identification is not consent. The conversations are sensitive and personal, even with names removed.

Protections must be established and applied to all 988 service providers, for any data storage and use. Protections are not only for persons calling, but also for volunteers and workers who answer. Crisis lines must be protected as safe spaces for human care.

988 Lifeline puts us in a bad position. It's not possible, when someone reaches out during crisis, to explain the risks of unwanted cops & uncontrolled data use. Let's stop it.



Are you also concerned? Please contact Tim Reiersen (he/him RYE er sun)  
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