



## Missouri House of Representatives

---

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
February 24, 2025

**CONTACT: Rep. Tricia Byrnes**  
**(573) 751-1460**  
[Tricia.Byrnes@house.mo.gov](mailto:Tricia.Byrnes@house.mo.gov)

### **Rep. Byrnes Exposes Critical Failures in 988 Crisis Hotline, Underscoring Urgent Need for Reform**

**JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.** – State Rep. Tricia Byrnes is doubling down on her commitment to strengthen Missouri’s 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline after a firsthand test exposed alarming deficiencies in the system. Her legislation, **House Bill 1148**, directly addresses these failures by ensuring crisis counselors provide real, effective assistance to those in need.

As part of a fact-finding effort, Rep. Byrnes tested the 988 system last week to evaluate its functionality. What she uncovered was deeply concerning.

“I initiated this test to see how well the system responds to individuals in crisis,” said Rep. Byrnes, R-Wentzville. “What I found was nothing short of a **catastrophic failure**. The responses I received were cold, robotic, and appeared to come from AI chatbots rather than trained crisis counselors. This is unacceptable. If someone in immediate distress were to reach out expecting real help, they might not get it—and that could cost lives.”

HB 1148 seeks to overhaul the 988 Lifeline by mandating that crisis counselors ask key questions at the start of every call or text to quickly assess the level of danger and determine the appropriate intervention. It also requires Lifeline centers to implement performance metrics to ensure real, human-driven support—not automated, pre-scripted responses.

Additionally, the legislation demands follow-up resources and a client satisfaction survey, allowing the Department of Mental Health to track system performance and identify areas for improvement.

“Missourians deserve a crisis response system that is reliable, compassionate, and effective,” said Byrnes. “When someone reaches out in their darkest moment, they should be met with real help—not generic, automated messages. HB 1148 is a necessary step toward fixing this broken system and saving lives.”

With Missouri's mental health crisis response under scrutiny, Rep. Byrnes is urging swift action on her bill. HB 1148 is currently under review, with **a hearing scheduled in the House Committee on Children and Families on Tuesday, February 25.**

*State Representative Tricia Byrnes, a Republican, represents part of St. Charles County (District 63) in the Missouri House of Representatives. She was elected to her first two-year term in November 2022. For more information, please contact Rep. Byrnes at 573-751-1460 or by email at [Tricia.Byrnes@house.mo.gov](mailto:Tricia.Byrnes@house.mo.gov).*

-###-