

Missouri House of Representatives

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No Charges Filed: Rep. Tricia Byrnes Moves to Improve 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Following an incident at the Missouri State Capitol on February 20, 2025, the Cole County Prosecutor's Office has announced that no charges will be filed against State Representative Tricia Byrnes. On that date, law enforcement officers responded to the Capitol building in reference to a potential emergency, prompting an investigation into the matter.

Representative Byrnes had previously identified significant issues with the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline's texting service. The 988 Lifeline provides critical support for mental health, suicide, or substance abuse crises, but automated responses are currently delaying access to live crisis counselors, potentially putting individuals at risk during critical moments.

"Ensuring compassionate and timely support for individuals in crisis is a moral imperative. House Bill 1148 strengthens the 988 Lifeline, ensuring no call for help goes unanswered, with immediate human intervention for those in acute crisis," Rep. Byrnes said. "I would also like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the intentional misuse of a hotline or emergency line should never be done under any circumstance. I have tremendous respect for our law enforcement and first responders, and I want to make clear that I am appreciative and supportive of those who run toward unknown danger every day to keep us safe including those who did so on February 20th. My issue lies with the 988 Chatbot that continues to inexplicably endanger lives across Missouri."

The Cole County Prosecutor's Office has reviewed the facts surrounding Representative Byrnes's recent test of the automated responses on the 988 text-line and determined no charges will be filed.

"I am thankful that the Prosecutor's Office found that I acted in my Legislative Capacity and in good faith during my legislative investigation into the chats bots and automations on the 988 text-line. I am committed to enhancing the 988 Lifeline and appreciate the dedication of all involved, including dispatchers and first responders," stated Byrnes.

To address the clear deficiencies in the 988 automated text system, Representative Byrnes introduced **House Bill 1148**, which requires crisis counselors to quickly determine whether a person needs immediate emergency intervention or emotional support. The bill also establishes ways to measure and improve the service's effectiveness, ensuring people receive prompt, personalized care.

IMPORTANT PUBLIC NOTICE: Representative Byrnes strongly emphasizes that the public must not attempt to test or investigate the 988 system independently. Unauthorized testing by non-governmental individuals could overwhelm the system and result in criminal charges.

The 988 Lifeline's integrity must be maintained for the safety of all who depend on it. For life-threatening emergencies requiring immediate action, always call 911.

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.

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