



For Young LGBTQ Lives

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Mental Hygiene

Monday, February 14, 2022

Testimony Submitted by Preston Mitchum, Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs, The Trevor Project

Thank you for the opportunity to provide remarks on the SFY 2023 Executive Budget proposal concerning areas of mental health. On behalf of the estimated 1.8 million-plus LGBTQ youth who seriously consider suicide each year, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in response to the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Mental Hygiene, specifically on the importance of 9-8-8 and investing in the crisis care continuum to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, & questioning (LGBTQ) youth. My name is Preston D. Mitchum, and I am the Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs at The Trevor Project.

Founded in 1998, The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ youth, and it is the only accredited national organization focused on suicide prevention among LGBTQ youth. In FY 2021, Trevor served more than 200,000 crisis contacts (calls/chats/texts) from LGBTQ youth who reached out for support. Trevor works to save young lives by providing support through five key programs:

- **Crisis intervention.** The Trevor Project is the largest organization providing 24/7 free, confidential crisis intervention services to LGBTQ youth via phone, text, and chat.
- **Peer support.** TrevorSpace is the world's largest safe space social networking community for LGBTQ youth.
- **Research.** Our Research program supports The Trevor Project in significantly improving our crisis services and brings new knowledge to the field of suicidology.
- **Education and public awareness.** Our education program develops research-based trainings and content on LGBTQ youth mental health and allyship and increases awareness of these topics in public discourse through PR, marketing, and strategic partnerships.
- **Advocacy.** Through legislation, litigation, and public education, The Trevor Project is the leading advocate for LGBTQ youth mental health in preventative efforts that address the discrimination, stigma, and other factors that place LGBTQ youth at a significantly higher risk of suicide.

The national mental health crisis is hitting our young people hard. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people. LGBTQ youth are more than four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. And for marginalized at-risk young people – such as those who are LGBTQ and/or people of color – the crisis is hitting even harder. But we have the tools to respond, and we can show our children – all of them – that they are not alone. We all have a role to play in fostering acceptance of the LGBTQ community, and providing love and support to the young LGBTQ people in our lives. It's on us to empower these youth to not only survive, but to thrive.

The designation of 9-8-8 as the new dialing code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) in 2020 was an important step towards addressing the mental health crisis and ensuring access to vital mental health care services, particularly for LGBTQ youth. 9-8-8 will become the new dialing code for the NSPL on July 16, 2022, and the American public will only fully benefit from the implementation of 9-8-8 if the Lifeline is appropriately funded and specialized services are provided for LGBTQ youth as an acutely at-risk community. This is what's particularly exciting about the 9-8-8 crisis hotline proposal in the Executive Budget.

The Trevor Project applauds the inclusion of \$35 million in FY2023, increasing to 60 million in FY2024, to support the implementation of the 9-8-8 Crisis Hotline in New York State. We are also thankful about legislation to authorize expanded supports and services and ensure the continuation of current suicide prevention call center resources. We especially know that it will be lifesaving for the LGBTQ young people who contact us every day.

Ensuring that 9-8-8 is equipped with appropriate specialized services for LGBTQ youth is a matter of life and death. The absence of specialized mental health care services for LGBTQ youth will mean that young people will not get critical, life-saving services. This is the very reason The Trevor Project exists, and according to a formal, external evaluation of Trevor's services, almost three-quarters of youth stated that they either would not or were unsure if they would have contacted another service if The Trevor Project did not exist.

Specifically, specialized services for LGBTQ youth must include the training of existing counselors in LGBTQ cultural competency and the establishment of an Integrated Voice Response (IVR) option for LGBTQ youth to receive more specialized care. Currently, there is no standard quality of care for any population dialing the NSPL, including LGBTQ youth, and specialty counseling for at-risk communities is essential to improving counseling effectiveness. It is vital that counselors who interact with LGBTQ youth receive specialized training so that they understand (1) the incredible diversity within the LGBTQ community; and (2) how the challenges faced may differ from those affecting their non-LGBTQ peers.

As alluded to in the Executive Budget, we must ensure 9-8-8 is fully invested in from the start and maintain that funding. We must ensure that there is coordination between 9-8-8 centers, 911 crisis services and other specialty warm/hotlines, including coordination of fire, law enforcement and medical response. It is also critical that New York State has the

authority to deploy crisis intervention services, including mobile crisis teams, and coordinate access to crisis stabilization services. And we must ensure that 9-8-8 works for serving high risk and specialized populations including LGBTQ youth, Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, and people with disabilities and provide follow up services as needed.

As we move forward with 9-8-8 implementation in July 2022, The Trevor Project stands ready as a partner. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please contact me at preston.mitchum@thetrevorproject.org or 919-672-3328.

Sincerely,

Preston D. Mitchum

Preston D. Mitchum, Esq. LL.M.
Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs
The Trevor Project