

SENATOR BECCA RAUSCH

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 27, 2021

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Senate Approves Funds for Youth Mental Health Support Text Line

The pilot program, administered by Samaritans, Inc., aims to address elevated rates of mental illness among youth through confidential and non-judgmental support

BOSTON – Wednesday evening, the Massachusetts Senate approved \$250,000 in funding during the FY 2022 budget debate for a pilot program for a youth mental health support text line.

The budget amendment, filed by **Senator Becca Rausch (D-Needham)**, will provide financial support to Samaritans, Inc. in developing a service accessible to any youth in the state of Massachusetts regardless of insurance, income or background. The text line will have dedicated staffing from Samaritans to train and oversee teen volunteers providing evidence-based suicide prevention and mental health support. This funding will also support marketing and communications to promote the service, suicide prevention and mental health support workshops for youth, as well as culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate services to reach diverse communities.

“The idea for this pilot program came directly from many of the youth I represent,” **said Senator Rausch**. “Earlier this month, I hosted a virtual student legislative forum in my district, and my constituents spoke frankly and fearlessly about classmates they lost to suicide, the real fears they faced when deciding to seek help for mental health problems, and clear need for robust and accessible mental health supports. I am so proud to partner with Samaritans provide our youth with resources they need and deserve.”

According to [Mental Health America](#), youth mental health is on the decline nationwide. 9.7% of youth in the U.S. have severe depression, and 60% of these youth do not receive any mental health treatment. Rates of depression are highest among youth who identify as more than one race, at 12.4%. Not only are the numbers of youth searching for help with their mental health increasing, but throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, youth ages 11-17 have been more likely than any other age group to score for moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression.

“The adoption of this amendment will be transformative to the work we can do to support teen mental health,” **said Samaritans’ Chief Executive Officer and President Kathleen C. Marchi**. “I am thrilled to partner with Senator Rausch in this work to save lives, and we are so honored to be considered in these advocacy efforts. Let this initiative be a model for how we can all support teens across the Commonwealth.”

“This is what true community partnership is about – coming together to provide support to those who need it most,” **said Samaritans’ Chief Clinical Officer Kacy C. Maitland**. “We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken an unprecedented toll on mental health, and the challenges for youth have been particularly severe. Working together, we can do our part to make sure our young people have the resources they need.”

For over 40 years, Samaritans have provided life-saving suicide prevention services and nonjudgmental support throughout Massachusetts. The service has trained more than 5,250 volunteers in befriending skills, provided suicide prevention workshops to 135,000 individuals, and lent aid and support to 13,000 individuals who have lost a loved one to suicide. In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, Samaritans continues to expand its crisis services and educate the public on topics in suicide prevention and mental health awareness.

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Senator Becca Rausch represents the Norfolk, Bristol and Middlesex District, comprised of Attleboro, Franklin, Millis, Natick, Needham, Norfolk, North Attleborough, Plainville, Sherborn, Wayland, Wellesley, and Wrentham.