

Ernie Stevens:

Not everybody that calls 911 needs a police officer to respond. So let's talk 988. Here's where people are calling to get mental health assistance. So this 988 is a transformative movement in America right now that's going to allow individuals with mental health needs to be able to call in to speak to a crisis line counselor in order to get a proper response. And really what it does is it limits law enforcement's response to a call that they really don't need to be responding to in the first place.

Now, if you look at it from law enforcement's point of view, law enforcement right now is having a very difficult time in retaining personnel and recruiting individuals. So this is just a perfect balance of transferring those types of calls that law enforcement is not specialized in responding to. Even though they are trying to do their best and keeping up with training, crisis, intervention training, mental health, first aid training, they still just don't have that specialty that's needed.

My message to law enforcement leaders, if you're just now coming to the table when it comes to the talks with 988, I envy you. You're in a particular point where 988 is going to be extremely transformative in the way that we respond to mental health crisis calls. This is an opportunity for you as a leader of your organization to understand how 988 works and be able to determine what type of response is going to be needed from your officers, if they need to respond at all.

So take the time to sit down with your collaborative stakeholders and get to know 988. Embrace this opportunity to be a trailblazer in your community.