

June 7, 2019

Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Docket 18-336 – regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018

Dear Commissioners,

I have worked and volunteered in both a Crisis/Suicide Hotline and a 2-1-1 call center for over 20 years. I have read the proposal and SAMSHA report regarding the creation of a 3-digit number for suicide prevention. While I agree that easy access to suicide hotlines is important, the addition of yet another number is unnecessary and could create additional confusion of who to call when in need.

*SAMSHA's report states: "...not all 211 centers have crisis capacity and the number 211 is associated with information and referral, which valuable, does not communicate that this number is a number that suicidal people or their families can call at any time of the day or night for immediate crisis intervention. In other words, the numbers 211 do not communicate a crisis or emergency service in the way that 911 does. In addition, using 211 as the national suicide prevention number would involve combining different functions, one urgent or emergent, and the other not. A crisis number needs to have unique characteristics, including availability 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. In addition, calling the number should result in rapid response and the number should be widely recognized as a crisis number, these are not typically characteristics associated as a 211 number."*

While this is true, what this report appears to fail to recognize is that almost all callers to a 211 center are in crisis, whether it be over loss of employment, needing financial assistance to avoid eviction, the need of medical care, divorce resources, etc. Many of these topics can lead people to thoughts of suicide if unresolved. Having worked in both environments, the skills are nearly identical: Both conduct active listening skills, both work to identify the urgent needs, both attempt to connect people with resources to help them through their crisis, both can conduct follow-ups.

Why create a new 3-digit number that people must learn? Why not spend time and money to help build up current 211 centers already in existence to help manage the calls of people who are at risk for suicide and help reduce the long wait times to speak with someone on the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline? My understanding is that nearly 25% of the call centers that answer 1-800-273-TALK (8255) are also 211, so there are already models out there to work from. For those centers that aren't ready, many use menu options that would allow press 1 for information & referral, press 2 if you are thinking about suicide.

I'm pretty sure 911 didn't convey police emergency when it first started. It took time and community education to raise awareness, an awareness that can be done with 211, an already known number in many communities.

Thank you,  
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