



United Way
of Frederick County



December 3, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

Dear Madam,

United Way of Frederick County appreciates the opportunity to comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline and to assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In Frederick County, our United Way is fighting for the health, education and financial stability by investing in 211 and working to promote awareness and access to this important service. We also invest in a variety of goals and objectives designed to support households that make less than the cost of living in our county. You can read more about our plans to effect long term changing by visiting <https://www.unitedwayfrederick.org/strategymap>.

We acknowledge efforts are needed to create a safe place for all people to call – especially underserved or marginalized populations such as seniors, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, people that identify as LGBTQ+, Veterans, American Natives, non-English speakers, and individuals facing complex problems such as substance/opioid use, human trafficking, and domestic violence. Our organization has an 80 year and counting history of reaching out to the underserved and today we partner with over a hundred businesses, nonprofit agencies and government stakeholders to drive systemic changes to solve our community's toughest problems like mental health and crisis.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 211 work here in Frederick County as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, we have invested annually to the success of 211 and our local call center answers over 43,000 requests for help each year. Moreover, each year our United Way invests more than \$584,000 in mental health, substance use, health, education, and other financial stability services. These critical investments position us to be key partners in the success of an improved mental health and crisis response system.

Another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. Despite concerted efforts by numerous social services, and multiple hotlines, in our community to educate and market the distinctions, a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. Our 211 receives calls that are better suited for 911, and our 911 partners often receive calls that we can best answer. We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a unified single point of access with a blended partnership of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and United Way's 211 services. We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps, not duplicate services, and will be a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

You can learn more about our work at <https://www.unitedwayfrederick.org/> and about our local call center at <https://fcmha.org/how-we-help/24-hour-mha-call-center>, and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 240-578-4006. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Oldham, President & CEO