

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 Secretary Dortch,

Having lost a cousin to suicide one year ago December 1st, so this is near and dear to my heart. United Way of Cass 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 Cass County our United Way is fighting for the health, education and financial stability by investing in 211.

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 81-year history of reaching out to the underserved and today we partner with numerous businesses, school systems, nonprofits and community leaders 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 Cass 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 \$6,800 per year to the success of 211 who answered 541 calls and provided 1,144 referrals in 2017. Moreover, each year our United Way invests more than \$275,000 in education, health and financial stability initiatives.

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. 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.

Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Armstrong".

Chris Armstrong
Executive Director