



December 5, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary  
Office of the Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> 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,

Heart of West Michigan United Way 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 Kent County, Michigan, our United Way is fighting for the reduction in poverty by investing in 211 and in priority areas, such as housing, family crisis, food security, mental/behavioral health, middle school STEM programming, and workforce development.

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 a 101-year history of reaching out to the underserved and today we partner with more than 330 organizations and government agencies 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 in Kent County as well as in 13 additional counties in Michigan as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, we have invested almost \$9 million to the success of 211 and answer more than 65,000 requests for help each year. Moreover, each year our United Way invests more than \$4.7 million 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 [www.hwmuw.org](http://www.hwmuw.org) and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 616-752-8620. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle Van Dyke".

Michelle Van Dyke  
President & CEO  
Heart of West Michigan United Way