



**United Way
of Southwest Louisiana**

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Thursday, December 6, 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 Ms. Dortch,

United Way of Southwest Louisiana 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 assessing the effectiveness of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

In Southwest Louisiana, our United Way is investing in 211, an easy to remember phone number that connects callers to all human service providers in their specific area. The service is provided 24/7/365 and can be used by calling, texting or going online.

We acknowledge efforts are needed to create a safe place for all people to call for help, especially underserved or marginalized populations, as people are facing complex problems such as mental health, substance/opioid use, human trafficking, and domestic violence. For over 78 years, United Way of Southwest Louisiana has been reaching out to the underserved. Today we partner with cities, law enforcement, corporate sponsors, human services agencies and volunteers to drive systemic changes meant to solve our community's toughest problems like mental health, homelessness and hunger.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 211 work here in Southwest Louisiana as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, United Way of Southwest Louisiana has invested over \$1.1 million in the 211 local system that answers more than 12,000 requests for help each year. United Way of Southwest Louisiana invests more than \$3.7 million in health, shelter, food, education, emergency response and other services each year in a five-parish area. These critical expenditures position us as crucial 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, 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

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partner often receives calls that we can best answer. We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a single unified 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 collaboration 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 unitedwayswla.org/211 and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 337.433.1088. Thank you for your time in addressing this critical issue and for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Denise Durel
President and CEO

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