

December 7, 2018



**United Ways
of New Jersey**

**PO Box 504
Cedar Knolls, NJ 07927**

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

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

Dear Madam:

On behalf of United Ways of New Jersey (UWNJ), a nonprofit and nonpartisan statewide association representing 14 local United Ways, I am appreciative of the opportunity to provide comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to examine the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline, as well as assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

United Way fights for the education, financial stability and health of every person in our communities throughout New Jersey. An integral part of our local United Ways' efforts to deliver on this promise is our 211 service that provides our neighbors with access to vital social and human services each and every day – services that include suicide prevention and mental health resources. In our state the 211 system is centrally run by the NJ211 Partnership, a subsidiary of UWNJ. 211 is such an important service and "lifeline" to the people within New Jersey that our state government continues to invest their funding alongside that of our local United Ways to sustain this 24-7 helpline. In times of disaster here in New Jersey, both natural and man-made, 211 has been literally that lifeline, connecting people to available shelter and other essential needs.

We acknowledge efforts are needed to create a safe place for all people to call – especially underserved or marginalized populations and individuals facing complex problems in today's world such as substance/opioid use, human trafficking, and domestic violence. We encourage the FCC to consider our 211 work here in New Jersey as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services.

Since NJ211 launched state-wide coverage in 2005, now more than 200,000 requests for help each year have been answered via telephone calls, with considerably more calls received in times of large-scale disasters such as Superstorm Sandy in 2012. This remarkable response has been made possible by the thoughtful foresight of the FCC's decision in July of 2000 to assign 211 to be used for access to community information and referral services, and this powerful tool for some nine million people living here in New Jersey is provided – in partnership – by the investment of millions of dollars by our local United Ways, the State of New Jersey and others.

These critical investments and partnerships position us to be key partners in the success of an improved mental health and crisis response system. It is our strong belief that another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help, just at a time when 211 has been gaining momentum in awareness and response. 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.

If the FCC is looking to increase the effectiveness of current suicide hotlines, we strongly recommend that resources 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. At United Way, 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 the work of our NJ211 Partnership at www.nj211.org.

Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue, the opportunity to provide this important feedback, and for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



John G. Emge
President