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Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Docket 18-336
Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing to urge you to designate a 3-digit code as a Behavioral Health and Suicide Crisis Lifeline. My perspective on the issue has been shaped by serving as a state mental health commissioner in 3 states (CT, OH, NY) over a 25 year career, advising on the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, and serving as Chairman of President G.W. Bush's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. I also served on the board of The Joint Commission and on the National Advisory Mental Health Council at the National Institutes of Health.

Deaths from suicide exceeded 47,000 in 2017, having increased steadily over several decades. Deaths and human suffering including overdose and mental illness are at record highs in the US. And have contributed to reduced overall life expectancy, for the 4th year in a row --the first time this has occurred in 100 years. Clearly, bold action is needed. Despite many valuable efforts, our resources cannot meet this level of need. In this environment and at this crucial juncture we urgently need to expand upon the nation's greatest resource for support and self-help to prevent suicide death.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (the Lifeline) network of community-based call centers is uniquely valuable service that connects with millions of callers in crisis annually, with proven effectiveness amidst steadily increasing demand. As recommended by the Congressional special mandate to the Commission, the creation of the Lifeline national behavioral health and suicide N-11 number, makes this service readily accessible, to the benefit of all of America's communities.

In 2004, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration launched the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline as an integrated national effort to reach people in crisis, using the single number 1-800-273-8255 as a uniform access point to connect to crisis services. The Lifeline has been a tremendous success – growing from just a few calls that first year to over 2 million last year, including over 700,000 calls to the national Veterans Crisis Line. This in spite of a long 1-800 number that is not easy to remember and access.

Three-digit access is an essential next step given the growth and proven effectiveness of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Three-digit access will:

- Deliver timely, effective and efficient crisis intervention services to millions of Americans
- Facilitate access to the affiliated Veterans Crisis Line, which is the cornerstone of suicide prevention for veterans
- Make it easier to connect people in need with help

- Meet the *dramatically* growing need for crisis intervention
- Help eliminate the stigma of mental health by normalizing help seeking for mental illness with the same priority we deliver for services like fire and rescue, social service referral, and telecommunication referral for people with hearing disabilities
- Provide a “911 for the brain” enabling us to turn the tide on suicide as we have started to do with heart attacks.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline saves lives every day, helping thousands of people each day find a way forward through their darkest moments. Highly trained call counselors, at the linked Veterans Crisis Line and over 160 call centers across the nation, help over 2 million Americans and their families each year cope with the challenges of mental wellness and suicidal crisis. The Lifeline network is proof positive of the power of behavioral health and suicide crisis intervention. Extensive, independent research has proven the effectiveness of crisis intervention by the highly trained counselors of the Lifeline affiliates nationwide.

A three-digit access line can help reduce the pervasive stigma associated with mental health challenges. A 3-digit access number for crisis services represents a national recognition that seeking help for behavioral health and suicidal crisis is just as much a part of life as seeking help for fire, for injury, or for other health and wellness needs. Far too many people, including men and young children have been lost to suicide as a direct result of social stigma and discrimination related to mental health struggles.

Finally, the Commission has received comments suggesting that 211 Info be used for 3-digit access to crisis intervention, rather than a dedicated behavioral health and suicide lifeline. I strongly disagree with this suggestion and have great concerns as to the burden it would impose on that network, the likely negative impact on Veteran suicide, and the delay and loss of life that could occur as a result— rather than expediting access as Congress intends.

We stand at the threshold of a revolution in improved mental health and wellness services for people throughout the United States. The FCC is poised to take an important step in that revolution by designating a 3-digit Behavioral Health and Suicide Crisis Lifeline.

In decades of leading mental health systems in the US, I have never witnessed such a transformational opportunity to improve access and save lives. I am strongly convinced that dedicated three-digit access is a crucial opportunity to reach millions of Americans experiencing behavioral health or suicidal crisis.

Thank you very much for your engagement in this issue that affects hundreds of millions of lives in our country every year.

Respectfully yours,



Michael F. Hogan, Ph.D.