

December 10, 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 Secretary Dortch,

Thank you for allowing United Way of Connecticut and United Ways across the country 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.

United Way of Connecticut, with support from the State of Connecticut and Connecticut's 15 local United Ways, operates 2-1-1 Connecticut. We are a free, confidential information and referral service and certified crisis intervention and suicide prevention line that has been connecting Connecticut residents to essential health and human services 24 hours a day, seven days a week for more than 40 years. 2-1-1 Connecticut is accredited by AIRS (Alliance for Information and Referral Services) and AAS (American Association of Suicidology) for its crisis work.

In FY18, 2-1-1 Connecticut Contact Specialists fielded more than 250,000 calls from Connecticut residents seeking food, housing, mental health services, financial assistance, and more. 114,456 of those calls were crisis calls from individuals faced with a behavioral, emotional and/or situational crisis. Crisis calls stemming from suicidal ideation, mental illness, addiction, and homelessness often results in multiple requests for service including basic needs assistance. 2-1-1 Contacts Specialists are able to address complex issues and provide holistic support to callers that present multiple needs. 2-1-1 Connecticut maintains a database of more than 40,000 programs and services allowing Contact Specialists to make appropriate referrals to meet caller's needs.

2-1-1 Connecticut is part of a national 2-1-1 network. Currently 2-1-1 services are available to 94.2% of the U.S. population. United Ways operate over 50% and an additional 25% are funded via United Way funds. Across the U.S., 2-1-1s answer nearly 13 million calls per year, and increasingly help clients through text messaging, web-based chat, and other mechanisms. In a typical year, 1 million of those requests are related to suicide, mental health, or addiction.

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. United Way of Connecticut 2-1-1 has a 42 year history of providing information, education and connection to services and is proud to be the first place Connecticut residents turn for help.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 2-1-1 work here in Connecticut as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 2-1-1 in 2000, Connecticut 2-1-1 has continued to connect millions of Connecticut residents with the mental health, substance use, health, education, and financial stability support they need.

Another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. 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 (NSPL) and 2-1-1 services. In addition, 2-1-1 CT currently handles calls on behalf of the NSPL for residents in crisis. We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps and rather than duplicate services, we hope to continue to be a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue.

Sincerely,



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