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NJ 2-1-1 Partnership

December 10, 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 Madam,

NJ 2-1-1 Partnership 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 New Jersey, our United Way is fighting for the health, education and financial stability by investing in 211 and the serving the most vulnerable populations including the homeless, those suffering with opioid addiction, seniors needing housing and utility assistance and working families facing financial hardship.

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 been answering the call for help since 2002 and has a history of reaching out to the underserved. Today, we partner with state departments including Department of Human Services, Department of Children and Families, Department of Community Affairs and Department of Health to address these issues. In addition, we work with several counties as the single point of entry and coordinated assessment for their homeless population. Lastly, our database contains over 3,000 agencies representing 10,000 services. They are nonprofits, faith-based organizations and government programs which assist with a wide variety of health and human service needs. These partnerships and resources assist 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 here in New Jersey as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 211, the United Ways of New Jersey have invested \$9.2M to aid in the success of NJ 2-1-1 Partnership. We have answered, on average, 180,000 live requests for help each year. Moreover, the United Ways in New Jersey invests approximately \$612K annually to our infrastructure which allows us to connect people in need with 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.



www.nj211.org

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.nj211.org and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 973-887-4618. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Melissa Acree
Executive Director, NJ 2-1-1 Partnership