

December 6, 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,

United Way of Palm Beach County 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 Palm Beach County we are fighting for the health, education, and financial stability of our residents by investing in 211 and their life-saving mission that provides crisis intervention, including emergency counseling and suicide prevention, substance abuse assistance, and shelter resources from violent domestic situations.

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 abuse, human trafficking, and domestic violence. Our local 211 organization has a 47-year history of responding to the needs of the underserved and today we partner with many other local funders to ensure they are able to continue this vital mission.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 211 work here in Palm Beach County and on the Treasure Coast as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Many 211s across the nation, like our local 211, provide blended services- services that include both information & referral as well as suicide prevention. Since the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, United Ways from Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River, and Okeechobee Counties have invested millions of dollars to ensure the success of 211 who answers over 100,000 requests for help each year, ***including responding to thousands of suicidal callers.*** Their critical investment positions us to be key partners in the success of an improved mental health and crisis response system.

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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 in our country.

Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Laurie George, Ph.D.  
President & CEO

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