



United Way of Greater Houston

United Way Center for
Philanthropy, Leadership
and Volunteerism

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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,

For nearly 100 years, United Way of Greater Houston has been the safety net for our community by providing life-saving services to meet our neighbors' most basic needs, like food and shelter. For others, we provide the support needed to get through a tough time. And for others, we provide a pathway to self-sufficiency and success. For all of our neighbors, we are a symbol of hope, an agent of change, a leader, a convener, and the organization working to improve the quality of life for everyone in our area.

Since 1947, we have been providing help and hope through information and referral resources and were one of the first 2-1-1s to launch in the country in 2002. Our 2-1-1 Texas/United Way HELPLINE operates 24/7, 365 days per year and connects more than 1,000,000 people annually to life-saving resources.

For mental health crisis calls, our trained specialists are a calming voice while conducting a lethality assessment prior to providing a warm transfer to a crisis counselor at our local accredited mental health center.

I appreciate 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 the Greater Houston Metropolitan area, our United Way is fighting for health, education and financial stability by investing in 2-1-1 and creating opportunities for every person in our community to thrive.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 2-1-1 approach to suicidal callers in the Greater Houston area as a best practice in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. We are so committed to our 2-1-1 services that we have invested more than \$16 million in the last 10 years to this critical service and have increased our capacity to handle over 1,000,000 calls for help each year.

Moreover, each year our United Way invests more than \$50 million in 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.

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 2-1-1 receives calls that are better suited for 9-1-1, and our 9-1-1 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 2-1-1 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.

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

Very truly yours,



Anna M. Babin
President and CEO