



United Way of  
Washington County

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 Madam,

United Way of Washington 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 Washington County, Wisconsin, our United Way is investing in 211 as part of our strategy in fighting for the health, education and financial stability for all.

We acknowledge efforts are needed to create a safe place for all people to call when they need help – especially underserved or marginalized populations such as seniors, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, people that identify as LGBTQ+, Veterans, American Natives, and non-English speakers. Individuals facing complex problems such as substance/opioid use, human trafficking, and domestic violence especially need comprehensive resources to address their issues.

Since 1936 our local United Way has been diligently working to improve lives and community conditions. Today, we partner with nearly 3,500 donors, 20 partner agencies, and countless volunteers to address our community's most challenging problems like addiction, homelessness, hunger, and mental health issues.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 211 work here in Washington County, Wisconsin, as a key strategy in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, United Way of Washington County has invested \$59,000 to support the critical services that 211 provides to our community. In 2017, 211 answered more than 700 calls for help from our local community. 211 also provides online, text, and chat support to individuals reaching out for help. Moreover, each year United Way of Washington County invests more than \$1,100,000 in programs addressing mental health issues, 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.

**A Uniting Force for Good.**

Creation of another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. Despite concerted efforts to educate the public about multiple hotlines and call lines, a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. 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. United Way will be a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

You can learn more about our work at [www.UnitedWayofWashingtonCounty.org](http://www.UnitedWayofWashingtonCounty.org) and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 262.338.3821.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristin Brandner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristin Brandner, Executive Director  
United Way of Washington County