



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,

IMPACT Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services, Inc. (IMPACT) and the United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County 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 partnership with United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County; United Way of Racine County; United Way of Washington County; and United Way of Kenosha County, IMPACT is the designated provider of 2-1-1 services to the nine counties comprising Southeastern Wisconsin 24/7/365. As the 17th busiest 2-1-1 call center in the country, the scope and depth of our capabilities have grown since taking our first call in 2002. We now respond to more than 300,000 requests each year phone through calls, chats, texts and online searches.

As our knowledge and expertise evolved, so did our ability to respond to crisis calls: domestic violence; child and elder abuse; lethal heroin and opioid addictions; and, most critically, suicidal callers. Our ability and reputation to be “first responders” for these callers quickly spread. Through careful consideration and detailed planning, we have become the crisis call center for the Milwaukee County and Waukesha County behavioral health divisions. Their seven-digit crisis hotlines ring in our 2-1-1 call center. Together, we have established a process that has resulted in a more efficient and effective service in which we engage each month with over one thousand people experiencing a mental health crisis.

We triage each caller for safety; assess those who we can assist; and immediately dispatch a county mental health professional and/or 9-1-1 to those who are in imminent danger. The benefits are two-fold: those in need get a faster, immediate response including access to a “warmline” session, when appropriate. Secondly, the mental health crisis staff is available for immediate dispatch into the community and directly to the client because they aren’t staffing a phone line.

The power of a partnership with 2-1-1 is that our system is a trusted and reliable source of help. Many crisis/suicide callers already have an established relationship with the service, making it easy for them to make that critical call. In the end, IMPACT has demonstrated not only the viability of the 2-1-1 system as a first responder suicide hotline, but as an improvement in efficiency and effectiveness to the system. This year, we have taken 9,795 calls related to a mental health crisis, including those who are considering suicide. We have taken 7,057 additional calls from others seeking assistance with a mental health concern.

We strongly encourage your consideration to engage with the established national 2-1-1 network of providers.

Respectfully,

John M. Hyatt
President & CEO, IMPACT

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