

December 5, 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 Central Alabama 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 Central Alabama (Jefferson, Shelby, Blount, Walker, and St. Clair Counties), our United Way is fighting for health, education and financial stability by investing in 211, direct community services, and the alignment resources, efforts and best practices to achieve collective impact to address disparities in education, health, and financial stability.

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 a 95 year history of reaching out to the underserved and today we partner with hundreds of businesses, nonprofit agencies, gov't stakeholders 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 Central Alabama as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, we have invested \$3.6 million to the success of 211 and answer 30,000 requests for help each year. As part of our 211 Call Center operations, our program has a formal MOU and shares space with the Crisis Center Birmingham to appropriately meet the needs of callers in crisis. Moreover, each year our United Way invests more than \$25 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 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.uwca.org](http://www.uwca.org) and [www.211connectsalabama.org](http://www.211connectsalabama.org), and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at [insert office number]. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John A. Langloh  
President and CEO  
United Way of Central Alabama