

United Way of Greater Kansas City

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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,

United Way of Greater Kansas City 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. We fight for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in our community. As part of that mission, we invest and believe in the 211 service that provides our neighbors with access to vital social and human services and resources every day – including suicide prevention and mental health resources.

We appreciate the efforts to improve access to services for people in mental health crisis. We also 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 one-hundred-year history of reaching out to the underserved. Today we partner with more than 1,000 businesses, nonprofit agencies and government stakeholders to drive systemic changes to solve our community's toughest problems, including mental health crises and their root causes

We encourage the FCC to consider our 211 work here in the Kansas City metro area as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, we have invested time and money to the success of 211 and we answer over 150,000 requests for help each year, including those seeking crisis support and mental health counseling. The United Way of Greater Kansas City 2-1-1 call center staff is trained to follow specific protocols to assess complex issues, provide appropriate support and reroute callers in crisis directly to the most appropriate mental health or suicide prevention resource; many of which are partners. Moreover, our United Way annually invests more than \$18 million in mental health, substance use, health, education and other financial stability services. These critical investments position us to be a key partner in the success of an improved mental health and crisis response system. United Way of Greater Kansas City 2-1-1 also has a partnership agreement with Crisis Text Line, a national crisis support text line available 24/7. We work closely together in achieving our mutual goal of offering free support to anyone in crisis by promoting each other's services to provide whole person support via community resource referrals by phone and crisis support via text messaging.

We have concern that 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. Regularly, our 211 receives calls that are better suited for 911 and our 911 partners often receive calls that we are best skilled to answer. Instead of another N-1-1, we recommend that resources 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 and advocate for the power of partnership in addressing gaps rather than duplicating services and we believe we will be a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

We are care deeply about suicide prevention, our veterans and proper continuum of care for those we serve. You can learn more about our work at www.unitedwaygkc.org. Please don't hesitate to reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 816-559-4604. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michelle Hogerty', with a stylized, flowing script.

Michelle Hogerty
Chief Operating Officer
United Way of Greater Kansas City