



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 Southwestern Pennsylvania 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 Southwestern Pennsylvania, our United Way is fighting for the health, education and financial stability by investing in and/or partnering with community partners to support 211 and low income families, children, people with disabilities and the elderly.

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 52-year history of reaching out to the underserved and today we partner with more than 70 partner agencies, more than 40 corporate sponsors and dozens of workplace campaigns, including businesses, nonprofits and government agencies, to drive systemic changes to solve our community's toughest problems like mental health and crisis.

We encourage the FCC to consider our long-standing and effective 211 work here in Southwestern Pennsylvania as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, we have invested in the success of 211 and find the service a valuable asset to addressing our communities needs for health and human services. Moreover, each year our United Way invests more than \$14.86 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 will 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 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. Our 211 staff current receives calls from people who are experiencing thoughts of suicide and are able to handle these calls. One of the 211 centers has staff cross-trained to handle crisis calls and 211 calls.



**United Way of
Southwestern Pennsylvania**

We respectfully note that our 211 staff work with vulnerable and homeless veterans on a daily basis to ensure that they are housed in an expedient manner and to make sure they are connected to service that can help them overcome whatever challenges they are facing.

You can learn more about our work at www.uwsdpa.org and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at (412) 261-6010. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Bob Nelkin
President and CEO
United Way of
Southwestern Pennsylvania