



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON



MAY 13 2011

The Honorable Julius Genachowski
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Mr. Genachowski:

We are writing to renew our request that the toll-free number, 1-800-SUICIDE, be permanently reassigned to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Our request was originally submitted to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on May 13, 2009. Both HHS and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) remain convinced that permanent reassignment is necessary to ensure the safety of callers who are at risk for suicide.

Among the services offered by HHS and VA, and available through the SAMHSA-funded National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Lifeline), is the Veterans Crisis Hotline, established in July 2007 by the VA and HHS. Veterans who call the Lifeline and "press 1" are directly connected to the VA's suicide prevention services. Since the FCC's temporary assignment of 1-800-SUICIDE to SAMHSA in 2007, SAMHSA has integrated calls to that number into the Lifeline network. Consequently, callers to that number also hear a greeting inviting Veterans and current Servicemembers to "press 1." In 2009 and 2010, more than 20,000 callers per year to 1-800-SUICIDE pressed "1" to receive specialized services for Veterans.

Since the date of our last letter, demand for crisis intervention services by Veterans and their families has increased steadily. (See enclosed chart.) Both HHS and VA have committed resources and expertise to address the growing needs of these callers. If 1-800-SUICIDE does not remain part of SAMHSA's reliable and accessible Lifeline network, the safety of callers using 1-800-SUICIDE could be jeopardized.

With the shared goal of preserving vital services to address the mental health needs of our citizens, including our Veterans, HHS and VA seek the permanent reassignment of 1-800-SUICIDE to SAMHSA.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services

Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs

Enclosure

Calls to Veterans Crisis Line via 800-SUICIDE

Call volume per year: The following chart represents the volume of answered calls per year on the Veterans Crisis Line from callers who dialed 800-SUICIDE, including projections for the remainder of 2011. The projection is based on the call volume from January 1, 2011 to April 30, 2011.

