

January 27, 2020

Ms. Marlene Dortch
Secretary, Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

RE: Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018; FRN: 2019-28429

Dear Secretary Dortch:

On behalf of the National Council for Behavioral Health (National Council), I am writing in support of the Federal Communications Commission's proposal to designate 9-8-8 as a three-digit dialing code for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system. The National Council is the unifying voice of America's health care organizations that deliver mental health and addictions treatment and services. Together with our 3,300 member organizations serving over 10 million adults, children and families living with mental illnesses and addictions, the National Council is committed to all Americans having access to comprehensive, high-quality care that affords every opportunity for recovery.

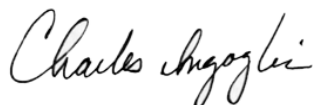
With suicide and drug overdose deaths in the United States on the rise, now is the time to embrace mental and emotional wellness as a national priority. Establishing a ubiquitous, recognizable national number for mental health and suicide prevention would be a transformative step for our nation's public health response to the suicide and drug overdose. Such a code would make it easier for millions of Americans to access timely and effective crisis intervention services, will better meet the growing need for such services, and will ultimately help get people in crisis to the appropriate level of care in the community of mental health and addiction concerns by aligning crisis services for these issues with other emergency services for things like fires, automobile accidents, and social service referrals.

Following the enactment of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) conducted a study to determine the best three-digit telephone number to assign to the national suicide prevention and mental health lifeline. The FCC's final report to Congress recommended designating "9-8-8" as the universal dialing code given several advantages to using this code rather than other suggested codes like "6-1-1." National Council appreciates and supports the FCC's recommendation to designate 9-8-8 for the sole purpose of a national suicide prevention and mental health hotline.

We thank the FCC for allowing concerned citizens, mental health professionals, and crisis service representatives to comment on this critical issue. We will not get another opportunity to so dramatically improve the way our country responds to and serves people in emotional and suicidal crisis. We urge you to support the designation of the 9-8-8 dialing code to connect the millions of Americans living with mental health conditions and suicidal thoughts with the services they need.

The National Council appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on this issue. If you have any questions, please contact Reyna Taylor at ReynaT@TheNationalCouncil.org or 202-774-1659. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Charles Ingoglia, MSW
President and CEO
National Council for Behavioral Health