

February 14, 2020

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Proceeding No. 18-336

Dear Chairman Pai,

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments and express our support for the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) proposed rule, *Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018*. MHLG is a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders. Together, we are and care for millions of Americans living with mental illness and substance use disorders and have unique perspectives on the need for robust access to crisis support for those at risk for suicide and other mental health crises.

Mental health and suicide prevention are critical issues for our country. Without adequate care, people with mental illness disproportionately end up on our streets, in our jails, and in our emergency departments. To change this costly dynamic—which takes an enormous toll on both human lives and our nation's resources—we need readily accessible crisis care as an essential component of our mental health service system. Services and programs such as the National Suicide Lifeline, the Veterans Crisis Line and other mental health hotlines, offer lifesaving support to those in crisis and can act as an important link to ongoing mental health care. Simplifying the public's access to these services will be lifesaving.

MHLG fully supports the FCC's proposed rule plan to identify a three-digit number – 9-8-8 – to be designated for suicide and other mental health crises. It is important that the designated number can be implemented quickly and with minimal confusion for the public. We implore the FCC and other policy leaders to make it a priority for the new 9-8-8 system to be nationally available and adequately resourced, so that all Americans have access to this crisis line.

To meet the anticipated increased demand, we see the need for increasing the capacity of crisis call centers, training call takers in cultural competency, and implementing processes that would allow calls to be routed to specialized services, particularly for at risk communities such as LGBTQ youth. It is important that we not only invest in simplifying access to the hotline but also in expanding the capacity to provide timely responses to all mental health crises.

As organizations leading the fight to improve access to mental health care, MHLG believes that establishing a national number for mental health and suicide prevention offers a unique

opportunity to transform how our nation accesses mental health care. Thank you for your leadership as we work to achieve our goal of improving access to crisis support for all Americans.

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Association of Suicidology

American Counseling Association

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Mental Health Counselors Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychiatric Nurses Association

American Psychological Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Centerstone

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Children's Hospital Association

Cities Thrive

Clinical Social Work Association

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Eating Disorders Coalition

Education Development Center

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium

Mental Health America

National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
No Health Without Mental Health
Postpartum Support International
The Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies
The Jewish Federations of North America
The Kennedy Forum
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
The Trevor Project