



September 9, 2019

The Honorable Seth Moulton
1127 Longworth HOB
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chris Stewart
2242 Rayburn HOB
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Moulton and Stewart:

As leading voices on suicide prevention in the United States, we welcome the *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act* as a historic and critical effort to turn the tide on the crisis of suicide and mental wellness in the country. We know first-hand that the depth of the crisis is growing – and we know that connecting people with crisis intervention saves lives. The US needs a 911 for the brain **now** - a universal, easy to remember, three digit number to connect people struggling and in crisis with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the Veterans Crisis Line - the nation's mental health crisis intervention network. —and your legislation would make that a reality. We applaud and appreciate your remarkable leadership in sponsoring this legislation.

As the recent Federal Communications Commission report recognizes, the reality is we are in the midst of a suicide crisis: Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people - and the tenth leading cause of death overall. Nearly 50,000 people died by suicide last year and over 10 million Americans have serious thoughts of suicide.

As the FCC report also recognizes, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a potent and effective resource in reducing suicide, as evaluations have continuously demonstrated that the Lifeline reduces suicidality, and Lifeline counselors around the nation help tens of thousands of people every single day.

We celebrate the FCC's conclusion that we urgently need a universal 3 digit number for accessing the Lifeline, but we also believe that as the *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act* advances, it is important to have further discussion regarding the best possible way to achieve this important goal.

The FCC report identified some significant obstacles in using 988 as the 3-digit access code – for example, the number is not currently available in some communities in the United States, and the number obviously lacks the familiarity and easy-to-remember features of 611. We would welcome a thorough discussion of these obstacles, and how they might be overcome with 988 – or whether it would be more effective to use a number such as 611, or perhaps a very memorable alternative in 999 (as is used in the United Kingdom).



So today we celebrate the historic introduction of the *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act* to create and fund a 3-digit line to access the Lifeline - and we call on Congress to work expeditiously to implement this important objective in the most effective way possible.

We further call on Congress to work with people with lived experience coping with suicide, suicide loss survivors, mental health consumers and advocates, suicide prevention experts and telecommunications experts like the FCC to better understand the obstacles to using 988 as the three digit access number, and whether 611 or some other number such as 999 would be the most effective number for achieving our universally shared objective. Above all, we are all now working on a shared path towards creating an easy, universal access to crisis services to help reverse the crisis of mental health and suicide in our communities.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Williams
President and CEO
Vibrant Emotional Health

Dwight Holton
CEO
Lines for Life