

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
ANNOUNCING NEXT STEPS ON DESIGNATING THREE-DIGIT NUMBER FOR NATIONAL
SUICIDE PREVENTION AND MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS HOTLINE**

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When I was growing up, suicide was generally considered a taboo subject in our country. It was a topic that was rarely discussed. Many embraced the view that talking about suicide would encourage it.

We understand today, of course, that the opposite is true. By speaking openly about suicide, we reduce the stigma surrounding the subject. And we make it easier for people to talk about their struggles and seek the help they need. Many organizations represented here today have played an important role in bringing the issue of suicide out into the open.

Thank you to the National Council for Behavioral Health for hosting us and for the important work you do. Thank you to the representatives from the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Health and Human Services who are with us, reinforcing that combatting suicide is a government-wide priority.

A special thanks to Senator Gardner for his leadership on this issue. And I'd like to salute those Members of Congress who couldn't be with us this afternoon, in particular, Senator Tammy Baldwin and Congressmen Chris Stewart and Seth Moulton. This issue enjoys strong bipartisan support on Capitol Hill, and I'm hopeful and confident that we'll see similar collaboration at the FCC.

And thank you to our many other distinguished guests, including Centerstone CEO David Guth, my fellow Kansan, Sam Brinton, of The Trevor Project, and representatives of LGBT Tech.

Before I get to my announcement, I think it's important to lay out the facts.

Fact one: suicide and mental health disorders are on the rise in America and have reached historic levels.

Suicide rates in the United States are at their highest levels since World War II. In 2017, more than 47,000 Americans died by suicide. That represents a 33% increase since 1999. And more than 1.4 million adults attempted suicide.

This crisis is disproportionately affecting at-risk populations. More than 20 Veterans die by suicide every day. Between 2008 and 2016, there were more than 6,000 Veteran suicides each year.

Perhaps the most disturbing trends involve young people. More than one in 10 young adults report having suicidal thoughts, a 47% increase since 2009. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death on college campuses. And LGBTQ youth contemplate suicide at a rate almost three times higher than heterosexual youth. More than half a million LGBTQ youth will attempt suicide this year alone.

Fact two: suicide is preventable.

Suicidal thoughts don't inevitably lead to suicide. Help is available, and it can be effective. When people get assistance, they are less likely to die by suicide. In one review of 550 suicidal individuals who reached out to Lifeline crisis centers, 95% of callers reported that the call helped stop them from killing themselves. Nearly 80% of these same callers said that follow-up contacts six to twelve weeks later had a positive impact, giving them hope and making them feel cared about.

Fact three: when we make it easier for people in need to seek help, many will do so.

Here's just one example. In 2017, the rapper Logic released a song about suicide. It had an unusual title, but one familiar to people in this room: 1-800-273-8255. For those who don't know, that's

the number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The song struck a chord with audiences and has been streamed over 1.5 billion times across various platforms. More important, in the three weeks following the song's release, there was a 27% increase in the number of calls to the Lifeline. Think about that. If one pop song can significantly move the needle, just imagine how many more people could get the help they need if there were an easy-to-remember 3-digit number for emergency suicide prevention and mental health services.

There could be. There should be. And I'm here to announce that, should I get the support of a majority of my FCC colleagues, there will be.

Today, I'm proposing that the FCC move forward with the necessary steps to establish 988 as a national 3-digit number to access suicide prevention and mental health services. Under my proposal, anyone calling 988 would be routed to the established National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which is already saving lives. I shared this proposal with my FCC colleagues this morning, and we'll vote on it at our December 12 meeting. I would like to thank members of the FCC staff, many of whom are with us today, for their hard work on this issue.

Based on our staff's careful analysis, I believe that we can get 988 up and running more quickly than other 3-digit numbers. And quicker access will mean more lives saved. In addition, 988 has an echo of the 911 number we all know as an emergency number. Awareness of this resource—including how memorable the number is—should make a real difference when those in dire straits want to reach for a lifeline.

Of course, an increase in calls will mean increased demand for crisis centers, which will require increased resources. That's why it's so important that this effort has the support of Members of Congress from both parties, representatives from the relevant federal agencies, and nonprofit organizations that provide counseling services. We all recognize that the FCC's proposal needs to be part of a broader effort. And today's event shows that we have a coalition willing and able to improve America's mental health support network.

Establishing 988 as a hotline for suicide prevention and mental health services would help so many people. At this very moment, there are Americans all across this country who are struggling. They are searching for answers. They are searching for hope. They are searching for connection. And to them I say: you are not alone. The FCC is committed to helping. The people in this room are committed to helping. A simple number, 988, could be the lifeline that makes all the difference. Working together, we can make this happen. Working together, we can and we will save lives.