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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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July 1, 2020

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

Received & Inspected

JUL 09 2020

FCC Mailroom

Dear Chairman Pai:

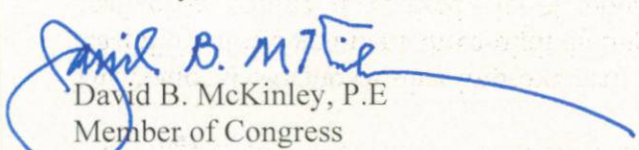
Thank you for the work the FCC has done to designate a nationwide three-digit phone number for suicide prevention and mental health. Under the proposed rule, telecommunications companies have two years to complete their transition to the 9-8-8 number. Simplifying access to this hotline will save lives and we cannot afford to move slowly. It is imperative that you encourage telecommunications companies to complete this transition quickly.

The National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act (PL 115-233) required the FCC to examine the feasibility of designating a three-digit dialing code for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline. It required a lot of coordination between the FCC and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We hoped after the report was released last year, the Commission would move quickly through the formal rule-making process.

It was encouraging to hear that the Commission plans to move forward with this plan at their July meeting. However, the FCC should encourage carriers to complete the transition well before July of 2022. It is understandable that companies must make upgrades to accommodate the non-N11 dialing code. However, the Commission should continue to work with the companies to ensure rapid deployment.

Every day, we lose an average of 120 Americans to suicide. It is critical that we work quickly to establish this three-digit number that will provide those struggling with quick and easy access to the help they need. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


David B. McKinley, P.E.
Member of Congress



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

September 30, 2020

The Honorable David B. McKinley
U.S. House of Representatives
2239 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

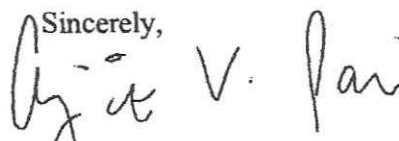
Dear Congressman McKinley:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's implementation of the 988 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. I agree that this is a critical issue, with suicide rates reaching the highest levels seen since World War II. Establishing the easy-to-remember 988 as the "911" for suicide prevention and mental health services will make it easier for Americans in crisis to access the help they need. And when more Americans receive these services, we know that more lives will be saved.

As you know, the Commission adopted at its July Agenda meeting my proposal to require voice service providers to transmit 988 calls to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by July 16, 2022—the earliest technically feasible date for nationwide implementation of 988. The new rules will apply to all telecommunications carriers as well as all interconnected and one-way Voice over Internet Protocol providers. The two-year transition reflects the real challenges of this nationwide effort, including the need for widespread network changes, transitioning numerous area codes throughout the country to 10-digit dialing, educating consumers, and providing time for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to prepare for the expected increase in the volume of calls. Some phone companies urged us to roll out 988 on a phased-in basis. But a uniform implementation date will minimize potentially deadly consumer confusion that could result from having 988 available in some, but not all, areas.

Although some providers may implement 988 before the deadline, I anticipate less consumer confusion with a single widely known "available-no-later-than" date, accompanied by coordinated, national consumer education campaigns by our federal partners. The FCC expects and encourages providers to coordinate with the FCC, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and Department of Veterans Affairs staff before moving forward with early adoption. This coordination will further facilitate clear and informative public education campaigns.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai