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For Immediate Release

**ACTING CHAIRWOMAN ROSENWORCEL PROPOSES EXPANDING
ACCESS VIA TEXTING TO 988 TO REACH SUICIDE PREVENTION
LIFELINE**

Proposal Would Lay Groundwork for Text-to-988

WASHINGTON, March 31, 2021—FCC Acting Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel today proposed that the FCC consider making the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, a national network that provides free, confidential support to Americans in suicidal crisis or emotional distress, reachable by text messaging to 988. The FCC previously established 988 as the 3-digit dialing code for Americans to reach the Lifeline by telephone beginning July 16, 2022. The Acting Chairwoman shared a proposal with her colleagues for their consideration at the Commission’s April 22 Open Meeting.

“We have a mental health crisis in this country, especially among young people, and we need to find accessible ways to reach them when they need help,” said Rosenworcel. “From the outset of this proceeding, I’ve thought the FCC should have a plan to make texting to 988 available as a tool for reaching the Lifeline. To truly impact at-risk communities, including our youth, we must acknowledge that texting is their primary form of communication. Today, we are taking an important step toward realizing that goal. I look forward to continuing to work with our partners at the Department of Health and Human Services’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that all Americans have easy access to suicide prevention and mental health crisis resources – whether through a phone call or a text message. In the meantime, I hope anyone in crisis will call 1-800-273-TALK for the support they need.”

Data demonstrates that suicide is on the rise generally, and particularly among young people. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is now among the top causes of death for teenagers and young adults. Suicide rates for teenage girls are at a 40-year high with the rate of suicide for girls between ages 10 and 14 tripling since the start of the millennium. There are similar, alarming, rates among black teens. And for LGBTQ youth, the numbers are staggering with more than 1.8 million expected to contemplate suicide this year alone.

Given the importance of text messaging to not only young people but also individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or have speech disabilities, the Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking proposes requiring text providers to implement texting to 988. This proposal, if adopted, would begin a process to ensure the agency is in a position to support text message access to crisis counseling should the record support it.

The Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking circulated by the Acting Chairwoman today to her fellow Commissioners proposes and seeks comment on requiring covered text providers to

support text messaging to 988 by routing text messages sent to 988 to the Lifeline. It also seeks comment on the types of text messages that would be supported, adopting a uniform nationwide implementation deadline for all covered text providers, technical standards for software and equipment, and whether and in what circumstances to require covered text providers to send automatic bounce-back messages to consumers where text-to-988 service is unavailable.

The full agenda for the April Open Commission meeting will be outlined later today by Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel in her latest Notes from the Acting Chairwoman:

<https://go.usa.gov/xshCf>. The formal agenda and public drafts of the agenda items will be available tomorrow at: <https://go.usa.gov/xshCM>.

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).