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**For Immediate Release****FCC TAKES FIRST STEP TO EXPAND ACCESS TO THE SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE BY SEEKING COMMENT ON TEXTING TO 988*****Proposal to Lay Groundwork for Text-to-988 to Better Support Youth and Individuals with Disabilities in Crisis***

WASHINGTON April 22, 2021—Today the FCC voted to approve a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to expand access to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by establishing texting to 988. The Lifeline is a national network that provides free, confidential support to Americans in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. The FCC previously established 988 as the 3-digit dialing code for Americans to reach the Lifeline by telephone beginning July 16, 2022. The approval of this item starts a process to ensure the agency is in a position to require that texts to 988 reach the Lifeline, should the record support it.

In 2019, 47,511 individuals died by suicide in the United States, and the toll of the global pandemic, economic challenges, and civil unrest has only increased the strain on many Americans' mental health and well-being. Data demonstrates that suicide is on the rise, 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. There are similar, alarming, rates among black teens, LGBTQ youth, and young people with disabilities.

Americans sent an estimated 2.1 trillion text messages in 2019. 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 support texting to 988.

In August 2020, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline “soft-launched” texting service and began responding to texts received on the Lifeline’s toll-free number. Similar to its traditional call intake protocol, the Lifeline’s trained crisis counselors use these means to assess for suicidal risk and provide crisis counseling and other essential services.

Given this new capability, the Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking 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.

During the transition to 988, Americans who need help should continue to contact the Lifeline by calling 1-800-273-8255 (1-800-273-TALK) and through [online chats](#).

Action by the Commission April 22, 2021 by Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 21-47). Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Carr, Starks, and Simington approving. Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel and Commissioner Starks issuing separate statements.

WC Docket No. 18-336

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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).*