

**STATEMENT OF
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018*, WC Docket No. 18-336, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (April 22, 2021).

This has been a year like no other. The pandemic-era pressures on our well-being are real. The consequences of closed-down businesses, shuttered classrooms, and distancing from family and friends are palpable. We're only starting to understand the mental toll this period has taken on all of us. But as we emerge from this time, I hope we can be mindful that there are those around us who may need a helping hand.

Today's rulemaking is all about how we provide that help. Suicide is now the second most common cause of death among teenagers and young adults. The rate of suicide for young girls has tripled over the last twenty years. For Black teens, we've seen similarly devastating increases. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer young adults contemplate suicide at a rate more than four times higher than their cisgender peers. Plus, young people who are deaf or hard of hearing are more likely to consider suicide than those without hearing disabilities. Now consider this pandemic and the associated economic challenges and you have the potential for a whole new level of crisis.

Let's all remind these young people that they are not alone. Family and friends can lend their ear and support. There is also the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline—1-800-273-TALK—a hotline that is available every hour of every day. Even better, last year the Federal Communications Commission set up a way to make this hotline easier to reach by simply dialing 988, a three-digit code. My predecessor in this role, Chairman Ajit Pai, deserves real kudos for making this a priority and ensuring that the 988 hotline will be available to all next year.

Now let's go one step further. While a voice hotline has its benefits, traditional telephone calls are no longer native communications for many young people. Texting is where they turn first. That's especially true for many at-risk communities, including LGBTQ youth and people with disabilities. So it's time to make the suicide prevention hotline text accessible with 988. Because it shouldn't make a difference how you reach out in an emergency. We should connect people to mental health resources no matter how they communicate in crisis.

Of course, making this happen will take some work. So we start that process with our rulemaking today. We seek input from the Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs who have been our partners in developing the 988 system. We seek guidance from those who helped support 988 for the hotline, as well as all others with insights into how a texting system might work. We also seek comment on the technical and legal issues associated with this approach—how to define covered text messages, how to make sure that carriers properly direct texts to 988, what network and equipment upgrades may be necessary to support this system, and how quickly to require carriers to implement our proposal.

I want to specifically thank our partners at SAMHSA and the VA, who oversee the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the Veterans Crisis Line. We can't get to text to 988 without you, and I pledge that we will work with you every step of the way.

A big thank you also goes to the agency staff who have worked tirelessly on this effort, including Pamela Arluk, Allison Baker, Emily Caditz, Elizabeth Cuttner, Justin Faulb, Jesse Goodwin, Heather Hendrickson, Lisa Hone, Daniel Kahn, Melissa Droller Kirkel, Kris Monteith, Zachary Ross, and Michelle Sclater of the Wireline Competition Bureau; Garnet Hanley, Charles Mathias, Susan Mort, Wesley Platt, Jessica Quinley, and Catherine Schroder of the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau; Terry Cavanaugh, Richard Mallen, and Linda Oliver of the Office of General Counsel; Patrick Brogan, Stacy Jordan, Eugene Kiselev, Eric Ralph, and Emily Talaga of the Office of Economics and Analytics; Diane Burstein, Eliot Greenwald, Debra Patkin, and Suzy Rosen Singleton of the Consumer and

Governmental Affairs Bureau; and Brenda Boykin, Kenneth Carlberg, John Evanoff, David Furth, Rasoul Safavian, and Rachel Wehr of the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau.