



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE
CHAIRWOMAN

November 27, 2023

The Honorable Marcus Molinaro
U.S. House of Representatives
1207 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Molinaro:

Thank you for your letter regarding the efforts of the Federal Communications Commission to improve the routing of calls placed to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (Lifeline). As you note, the Commission designated 988 as the easy-to-remember, 3-digit dialing code for the Lifeline to make it easier to connect those in crisis with the help they need. Over the year following the implementation of 988, the Lifeline responded to nearly five million contacts. This is nearly two million more than the previous 12 months. This volume alone is a demonstration of what a critical, life-saving resource the Lifeline can be, and I share your goal of making it as accessible and effective as possible.

One way that we can enhance the effectiveness of the Lifeline is by improving the routing of 988 calls. Currently, calls to 988 are routed by area code to the nearest crisis center. For example, when a caller located in Virginia with a 703 area code calls 988, the Lifeline will route the call to a Virginia call center regardless of the caller's location. While all callers to 988 will be connected to trained counselors, routing calls to local crisis centers can facilitate access to local public health and safety resources that may be needed in emergencies.

For this reason, the Commission and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) at the Department of Health and Human Services, have been examining ways to route calls to 988 based on location without impinging on legitimate health privacy concerns and related legal requirements. Following a productive 988 Geolocation Forum, held in 2022 by the Commission in coordination with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Commission and SAMHSA have continued exploring ways to route calls from wireless handsets to a nearby 988 call center, regardless of the area code of the caller's phone number. This could be done by identifying nearby cell towers but without implicating privacy and legal matters associated with sharing the precise location of the caller with the Lifeline. Building on that information, SAMHSA recently completed a successful proof-of-concept trial of a potential routing solution with its Lifeline Administrator and other industry partners in a lab environment.

Given the success of this proof-of-concept, on September 28, 2023, I wrote to the nation's three largest wireless carriers and several industry associations to encourage them to take the steps necessary to develop a 988 routing solution that could be deployed on wireless

networks within a reasonable time. Commission staff have since met with each recipient of those letters to discuss potential routing solutions and related challenges, and those discussions will continue as all stakeholders work toward a viable solution. As requested, Commission staff will be in contact with your staff regarding scheduling a briefing on this issue.

Ultimately, to work, any routing solution will require the cooperation of carriers, the telecommunications systems that serve the Lifeline, and the Lifeline administrator. Recognizing that this is an all-hands-on-deck effort, carriers are already discussing this matter directly with SAMHSA. In fact, because SAMHSA and its contract with the Lifeline administrator is such an integral part of the development of improved routing for 988 calls, I encourage you to reach out to SAMSHA directly with any questions you may have and I will invite them to join us at the briefing described above.

The Commission is proud of the work we have done in partnership with SAMHSA to support the Lifeline and looks forward to furthering our joint efforts to improve the routing of calls placed to 988.

I hope this information is helpful. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

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Jessica Rosenworcel



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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November 27, 2023

The Honorable Ann McLane Kuster
U.S. House of Representatives
2201 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Kuster:

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November 27, 2023

The Honorable August Pfluger
U.S. House of Representatives
1124 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Pfluger:

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November 27, 2023

The Honorable Nicholas Langworthy
U.S. House of Representatives
1630 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Langworthy:

Thank you for your letter regarding the efforts of the Federal Communications Commission to improve the routing of calls placed to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (Lifeline). As you note, the Commission designated 988 as the easy-to-remember, 3-digit dialing code for the Lifeline to make it easier to connect those in crisis with the help they need. Over the year following the implementation of 988, the Lifeline responded to nearly five million contacts. This is nearly two million more than the previous 12 months. This volume alone is a demonstration of what a critical, life-saving resource the Lifeline can be, and I share your goal of making it as accessible and effective as possible.

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November 27, 2023

The Honorable Anthony D'Esposito
U.S. House of Representatives
1508 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative D'Esposito:

Thank you for your letter regarding the efforts of the Federal Communications Commission to improve the routing of calls placed to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (Lifeline). As you note, the Commission designated 988 as the easy-to-remember, 3-digit dialing code for the Lifeline to make it easier to connect those in crisis with the help they need. Over the year following the implementation of 988, the Lifeline responded to nearly five million contacts. This is nearly two million more than the previous 12 months. This volume alone is a demonstration of what a critical, life-saving resource the Lifeline can be, and I share your goal of making it as accessible and effective as possible.

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November 27, 2023

The Honorable Tony Cárdenas
U.S. House of Representatives
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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November 27, 2023

The Honorable Seth W. Moulton
U.S. House of Representatives
1126 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Moulton:

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