

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER BRENDAN CARR**

Re: *Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Act of 2018*, Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Docket No. 18-336 (Apr. 25, 2024).

A year ago, in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, I had the opportunity to visit the Helpline Center—an organization that provides mental and behavioral health services and that answers over 100,000 calls to 988 every year. That’s where I had the chance to meet Janet, one of the Helpline’s counselors. She is someone that makes a difference in people’s lives every day she goes to work.

One of the points that Janet and her talented colleagues conveyed to me during the visit was the difference that 988 has been making since the FCC helped stand it up just a short while ago. She noted in particular that this easy to remember number has resulted in people reaching out for help earlier in the lifecycle of a crisis and how that has enabled them to offer even more effective help in many cases. In fact they estimate that since 988 has been rolled out, they’ve seen about a 200% increase in the number of calls and texts coming in to the call center.

But they also thought there was more the FCC could do to improve the 988 system. In particular, they flagged call routing. With mobile phones and number portability, people don’t always call 988 from the geographic area associated with their area code. That means that someone reaching out for help in South Dakota could have their call routed to a helpline center located somewhere else in the country. That can make a difference in at least some cases in terms of the ability of call takers to connect with callers and provide relevant support and information. There has to be a way to route those calls to the local helpline while continuing to protect the privacy of callers and not discourage people from reaching out.

That is exactly the idea we put forward today. So I want to thank Chairwoman Rosenworcel for her leadership and work on this issue. I am glad that the item seeks comment from all stakeholders on ways we can identify solutions - this way we can ensure the rules that the Commission develops are practical and achievable to implement. I want to also recognize Senators Barrasso and Luján for their leadership and efforts to advance their bipartisan “988 Lifeline Location Improvement Act.” This legislation would ensure the FCC is in a strong position to ensure Americans have access to this vital resource when they need it most. And, finally, I want to thank the staff of the Wireline Competition Bureau for their work on these important issues. The item has my support.