

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

Re: *Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018*, WC Docket No. 18-336.

On August 12, 2014, the day after legendary actor and comedian Robin Williams died, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline received the highest daily call volume in its history. The director of the Lifeline credited the increase in calls to mention of the hotline number, 1-800-273-8255 (TALK), in media coverage of Williams' death.¹ More recently, on April 28, 2017, the rapper Logic released his song "1-800-273-8255." The song told listeners in crisis that they were not alone and that help was available. The result? The Lifeline had its second-highest daily call volume up to that point.²

These events indicate that awareness of the Lifeline will lead more Americans to reach out and seek help. Indeed, as the CEO of one of the Lifeline's crisis centers has explained, "[t]he hurdle we've always had is getting people to know how to find us."³

That hurdle is a significant problem, because the need for suicide prevention services has never been greater in modern times. Indeed, the suicide rate in the United States is at its highest level since World War II. In 2017, more than 47,000 Americans died by suicide and more than 1.4 million adults attempted suicide. And this crisis is disproportionately affecting various at-risk populations. More than 20 Veterans die by suicide every day and more than half a million LGBTQ youth will attempt suicide this year alone. A shorter, simpler suicide hotline number could be a game-changer.

That's why we're proposing to designate an easy-to-remember 3-digit dialing code—988—for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline. 988 has an echo of the 911 number we all know as an emergency number. And we believe that this 3-digit number, dedicated for this purpose, will help ease access to crisis services. It'll reduce the stigma surrounding suicide and mental health conditions. And it'll ultimately save lives.

Of course, easier access to the Lifeline will mean increased calls and greater demand for crisis services, which will require increased resources. So as we move forward with this proceeding, we encourage interested stakeholders to work directly with Congress and our federal partners who run the Lifeline, the Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs, to help increase the overall effectiveness of the Lifeline. These efforts may include specialized hotline services to address the needs of at-risk populations, such as Veterans and LGBTQ youth.

This effort has benefited greatly from the support and collaboration of members of Congress, mental health groups, and organizations representing communities who will particularly feel the impact of easier access to this Lifeline. I especially want to thank former Senator Orrin Hatch, Senator Cory Gardner, and Representatives Chris Stewart and Seth Moulton. I also want to thank the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs' Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, the National Council on Behavioral Health, Centerstone, The Trevor Project, and the LGBT Technology Partnership & Institute.

¹ Liz Szabo, "Calls to crisis hotlines surge after Williams' suicide," *USA Today* (Aug. 15, 2014), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/08/14/suicide-hotline-calls-surge/14053415/>.

² Jen Yamato, "Inside Logic's Grammy-nominated suicide prevention video, with Don Cheadle, Matthew Modine and a mission," *Los Angeles Times* (Jan. 26, 2018), <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-ms-grammys-hip-hop-logic-1-800-music-video-don-cheadle-20180126-story.html>.

³ Greg Miller, "Can Three Numbers Stem the Tide of American Suicides?" *The Atlantic* (Sept. 23, 2019), <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2019/09/suicide-prevention-hotline-988/598588/>.

And of course, this could not be possible without the FCC staff. For their outstanding work on this vitally important item, I'd like to thank Pam Arluk, Allison Baker, Justin Faulb, Jesse Goodwin, Heather Hendrickson, Dan Kahn, Melissa Kinkel, Celia Lewis, Kris Monteith, Claudia Pabo, Jordan Reth, Zach Ross, Michelle Sclater, and D'wana Terry of the Wireline Competition Bureau; Ken Carlberg, John Evanoff, Nellie Foosaner, and David Furth of the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau; Octavian Carare, Paula Cech, Stacy Jordan, Giulia McHenry, Chuck Needy, Eric Ralph, Emily Talaga, Shane Taylor, and Geoff Waldau of the Office of Economics and Analytics; and Terry Cavanaugh, Tom Johnson, Rick Mallen, and Linda Oliver of the Office of General Counsel. By working together and bringing this rulemaking to a successful conclusion, I am confident that we can and will save lives.