

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Ensuring the Reliability and Resiliency of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline*, PS Docket No. 23-5; *Amendments to Part 4 of the Commission's Rules Concerning Disruptions to Communications*, PS Docket No. 15-80; *Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018*, WC Docket No. 18-336, Report and Order (July 20, 2023)

It was a year ago this week that the 988 hotline went into effect. Thanks to the work of this agency, anyone, anywhere in this country can call or text this easy-to-remember, three-digit number for the Suicide and Mental Health Crisis Lifeline at any time.

The numbers show the early success of our efforts. During the past year, we saw a nearly 50 percent increase in the number of calls to 988 when compared to the ten-digit number that had been used for this lifeline in the past. And texting—functionality I insisted we add to 988—has proven even more popular than calls. All told, there have been five million people who have reached out to 988 in the last year.

The numbers demonstrate how deep the need is for this service. Because those are five million people who found a place to turn, someone to listen, and a way to receive support.

This week I visited with the Latin American Youth Center in Washington to talk about 988. This is an organization that helps young people transition to adulthood. The community they work with is low-income and often unhoused. One of the intake managers told me nearly all of the young people she signs up for services have used this number—some multiple times.

This week I also spoke with The Trevor Project and Whitman-Walker Institute about 988 and the communities they serve. LGBTQ youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers—not because they are inherently more prone to suicide because of their orientation or gender identity but because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized in society. Watch the cruelty of the discourse in our country right now. If we don't find a way to stop it, these numbers will grow.

These discussions were a reminder that when it comes to mental health in this country, we have real work to do. Remember also that great programs like 988 do not thrive without continuous attention and care. At the Federal Communications Commission we commit to that care today—and doing our part.

First, in this order we take steps to make sure 988 is reliable. In December of last year, the hotline experienced a brief nationwide calling outage. Today, we establish rules that require reporting and notification in the event of any future 988 outage, just like we require with 911. That means any hotline outage will be recorded in the Network Outage Reporting System and this information will be shared directly with the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the 988 administrator. Like with 911, it is vital that any problems with 988 are shared fast with the right people—so we understand what went wrong and can make it right.

Second, we know we have work to do to continue to publicize the new, three-digit hotline. I hope my colleagues will consider visits to do so this September during National Suicide Prevention Week and throughout the year. We will be happy to help each of you make this happen.

Third, we are working with our partners at the Department of Health and Human Services, and specifically the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, to find ways to better

connect people who reach out to 988 to resources in the communities where they actually make that call or text. Right now, we have underway a trial that tests routing 988 calls of those in crisis to receive care where they are rather than based on area code. We are mindful that this is not just a technical matter; because when it comes to healthcare there are vitally important issues with privacy and security and as we develop technical solutions, we want experts in mental health to work with us every step of the way. And we are making progress.

Thank you to those responsible for this effort, including Brenda Boykin, John Chapa, Rochelle Cohen, John Evanoff, David Furth, Amanda Groccia, Shabbir Hamid, Ryan Hedgpeth, Debra Jordan, William Kang, Nicole McGinnis, Erika Olsen, Austin Randazzo, Tara Shostek, and Rachel Wehr from the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau; Heather Hendrickson, Michelle Sclater, and Christi Shewman from the Wireline Competition Bureau; Stacy Jordan and Aleks Yankelevich from the Office of Economics and Analytics; William David Wallace from the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau; Matthew Warner from the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau; Jeremy Marcus, Ryan McDonald, Victoria Randazzo, and Shana Yates from the Enforcement Bureau; Deborah Broderson, Douglas Klein, Marcus Maher, Anjali Singh, Chin Yoo, and Bill Richardson from the Office of General Counsel; and Joy Ragsdale and Chana Wilkerson from the Office of Communications Business Opportunities.