

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

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).

Five million. That's the number of calls, texts, and chats that the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline has received in just a year, since we required that the Lifeline be reachable by an easy-to-remember three-digit number: 988.¹

Five million. Behind that number are people – young and old; men, women, and children; veterans; living in cities and rural areas – reaching out in their darkest hour. And more people than ever before. Last year's number reflects a 35 percent increase compared to when the Lifeline was only reachable via a 10-digit number.

Five million. Increased usage is no doubt a metric of success, but we cannot slow down when it comes to providing potentially life-saving services. I'm proud of our telecom community for not taking its foot off the gas here. There was an outage to the 988 Lifeline in December 2022. In January 2023 we proposed rules to ensure that the Commission, our federal partners at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the 988 administrator would be swiftly notified of any subsequent outage, so that people needing to reach the Lifeline could be re-directed and re-routed to alternate channels. Today, six months later, we adopt those rules. That follows the commendable pace that the FCC set – and our providers followed – in establishing 988 and text-to-988.

There is still work to do. Awareness of the Lifeline, and the service it provides, must increase.² Wait times for those contacting the Lifeline have dropped tremendously in the last year, and stakeholders will need to work hard to ensure that an increase in awareness does not reverse this trend. As always, in cross-cutting issues like this, I am glad to see lawmakers and advocates working together to serve the people, and I am proud of the FCC's role in doing so as well.

Thank you to the Commission staff who worked on this item, and who have worked on our steady stream of 988 items over the last few years. Five million. There's a lot behind that number, and you've played an important role.

¹ NPR, *988 mental health crisis line gets 5 million calls, texts and chats in first year* (July 15, 2023), <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2023/07/15/1187862144/988-mental-health-crisis-line-gets-5-million-calls-texts-and-chats-in-first-year>. See also KKF, *Taking a Look at 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Implementation One Year After Launch* (July 14, 2023), <https://www.kff.org/other/issue-brief/taking-a-look-at-988-suicide-crisis-lifeline-implementation-one-year-after-launch/>.

² Pew Charitable Trusts, *Most U.S. Adults Remain Unaware of 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline* (May 23, 2023), <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2023/05/23/most-us-adults-remain-unaware-of-988-suicide-and-crisis-lifeline>.