

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 27, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

We write to request the inclusion of S. 2661/ H.R. 4194, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act, in the next COVID-19 relief package. The creation of this three-digit dialing code is essential in order to address the growing suicide crisis across the United States. As our country is facing an unprecedented challenge in responding to COVID-19, this three-digit hotline would play a critical role in saving the lives of many vulnerable Americans who are facing mental health emergencies during this period of isolation and uncertainty. Suicide does not discriminate between rural and urban areas or by income, and it causes heartbreak and loss in communities in every single one of our states. We must ensure that we are doing everything we can to prevent these devastating outcomes from occurring, especially in these trying times as grief and uncertainty encompass our nation.

In 2018, Congress acted in a bipartisan fashion to pass the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act, directing the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to evaluate using a three-digit dialing code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In August 2019, the FCC released its report, which found that a national three-digit line would improve suicide prevention, and it recommended a simpler number that Americans could dial in times of crisis: 9-8-8 and has moved forward with an official Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. Right now, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a ten-digit long number for anyone contemplating suicide, and this lack of accessibility serves as a barrier to Americans seeking immediate help in a mental health crisis.

When someone is suffering from a heart attack or medical emergency, everyone knows to call 9-1-1, but for mental health emergencies, an easy-to-remember number does not exist. Because of this, we took bipartisan, bicameral steps to introduce or support S. 2661/ H.R. 4194 to designate 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline and to ensure states are able to support call centers as they deal with new levels of call volume. S. 2661 passed the Senate Commerce Committee on December 11, 2019 with unanimous support and is cosponsored by a bipartisan group of 33 senators, and H.R. 4194 passed the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology on March 10, 2020 with unanimous support and is cosponsored by a bipartisan group of 135 members of Congress.

The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act is not just smart policy that will save lives, but it is also a statement that our government recognizes our country's mental health crisis and is working across party lines to address it. On April 4, 2020, reports show that one call center in the network had only 22 crisis calls related to COVID-19 in February and that number grew by over 8,000% to 1,800 in March. Increasing the accessibility of life-saving services for people facing mental health crises will be a key step in fighting for a tomorrow in which Americans in crisis know they are not alone.

As our country is working together to address this virus, it is crucial that mental health support is at the forefront of all of our minds. Because of this, we urge you to include S. 2661/ H.R. 4194, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act, in the next COVID-19 relief package to ensure the expansion of accessibility to this life-saving hotline. Thank you for your continued support and leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

/s/ Cory Gardner

Cory Gardner
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Jerry Moran

Jerry Moran
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Stewart

Chris Stewart
Member of Congress

/s/ Seth Moulton

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

/s/ Greg Gianforte

Greg Gianforte
Member of Congress

/s/ Eddie Bernice Johnson

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

/s/ Todd Young

Todd Young
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/s/ Shelley Moore Capito

Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator

/s/ Marsha Blackburn

Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator

/s/ Deb Fischer

Deb Fischer
United States Senator

/s/ Martha McSally

Martha McSally
United States Senator

/s/ John Hoeven

John Hoeven
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema

Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/ Pete Olson

Pete Olson
Member of Congress

/s/ Tom Cole

Tom Cole
Member of Congress

/s/ David B. McKinley, P.E.

David B. McKinley, P.E.
Member of Congress

/s/ José E. Serrano

José E. Serrano
Member of Congress

/s/ Ben McAdams

Ben McAdams
Member of Congress

/s/ Abby Finkenauer

Abby Finkenauer
Member of Congress

/s/ Brian Fitzpatrick

Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

/s/ Harley Rouda

Harley Rouda
Member of Congress

/s/ Bonnie Watson Coleman

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

/s/ Tim Ryan

Tim Ryan
Member of Congress

/s/ C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger

C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress

/s/ Debbie Mucarsel-Powell

Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress

/s/ Susan Wild

Susan Wild
Member of Congress