

February 27, 2020

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chair, House Energy and Commerce
Committee
2107 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden
Ranking Member, House Energy and
Commerce Committee
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 2051

Dear Chair Pallone and Ranking Member Walden:

The undersigned national organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) write to express our gratitude for today's hearing and respectfully urge you to quickly move forward to mark up and pass H.R. 4194, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2019. Designating a 3-digit code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline will save lives.

As a broad and diverse coalition of national mental health organizations, MHLG members serve countless Americans who are at risk for suicide and other mental health crises. The need for easily accessible and well-supported crisis support for those at risk for suicide and other mental health crises has never been greater, and we feel this legislation is vital to achieving our collective goal of improving mental health crisis response and reducing suicide rates in this nation.

We are grateful for the action taken by the Federal Communications Commission on this issue, and many MHLG members contributed to the recently concluded public comment period. That said, it is our belief that Congress has a central role to play in making "988" a reality.

Given the anticipated increase in demand for the national lifeline's service after 988 goes live, call centers will need resources to meet that increased demand. To meet the anticipated increased demand, we see the need for increasing the capacity of crisis call centers, training call takers in cultural competency, and implementing processes that would allow calls to be routed to specialized services, particularly for at risk communities such as LGBTQ youth. It is important that we not only invest in simplifying access to the lifeline but also in expanding the capacity to provide timely response to all mental health crises.

As organizations at the forefront of the effort to improve access to mental health care, MHLG believe that establishing a national number for mental health and suicide prevention has the potential to transform how our nation accesses mental health care

in times of crisis. It is thus urgent that H.R. 4194 move forward with all deliberate speed. The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act creates an important opportunity to significantly reduce the suicide rate in the United States, and we thank the committee for their commitment to address this important issue.

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Suicidology

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention /SPAN USA

American Psychological Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Centerstone

The Kennedy Forum

Mental Health America

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association for Behavioral Healthcare

National Association of Social Workers

The Trevor Project