



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention



inseparable



The Jed Foundation



March 23, 2023

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Chair  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair McMorris Rodgers and Ranking Member Pallone;

The undersigned organizations write in strong support of H.R. 498, the “9-8-8 Lifeline Cybersecurity Responsibility Act.” This bill protects the security and integrity of the national suicide and mental health crisis hotline, helping to ensure this vital program is protected against future cyberattacks and prevent disruption of service.

In the United States, there are on average 130 deaths by suicide every day.<sup>1</sup> For people aged 10–14 and 25–34 years, suicide was the second-leading cause of death in 2021. That year, nearly 900,000 youth aged 12-17 and 1.7 million adults attempted suicide.<sup>2</sup> Many more individuals experience mental health emergencies and challenges.

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988 Lifeline), formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, provides an easy-to-remember dialing code for free emotional support and interventions to Americans in crisis and/or facing emotional distress. The 988 Lifeline, launched by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and administered by Vibrant Emotional Health since 2005, is a national network of more than 200

<sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2023, February 14). 988 Key Messages. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/key-messages>

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) Fatal Injury Reports. (2020, February 20). Retrieved February 9, 2021, from <https://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate.html>

local and regional crisis centers staffed with trained crisis counselors. These local centers are able to offer crisis intervention and emotional support; and have a knowledge of local mental health resources to connect those who may need ongoing care. The 988 Lifeline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week via call, text, or chat.

Cyberattacks continue to grow increasingly sophisticated. A cyberattack on a telecommunications provider handling 988 Lifeline network traffic (such as calls, chats, or text) could have disastrous consequences for people in crisis. A provider outage would leave vulnerable people with a reduced point of contact, or no contact, to the service that could save their lives. The 9-8-8 Lifeline Cybersecurity Responsibility Act will boost the cybersecurity of the entire network. It requires SAMHSA to coordinate with the Chief Information Security Officer of the Department of Health and Human Services to take steps to protect the 988 Lifeline from cybersecurity attacks, including eliminating known vulnerabilities. Not only does this crucial provision improve the overall security of the network if there is a threat or an attack, but it also helps prevent cyberattacks from happening in the first place, a necessary foundation for cybersecurity.

The bill also requires the network administrator for the 988 Lifeline to report identified cybersecurity incidents and vulnerabilities to SAMHSA and requires the local and regional crisis centers to report incidents to the administrator. A clear reporting structure will help mitigate the effects of any cyberattack, allowing for a quick response to manage the incident and help make sure the network stays online and available to help save lives.

Finally, the legislation directs the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study that evaluates cybersecurity risks and vulnerabilities associated with the lifeline and report the findings to Congress.

The 9-8-8 Lifeline Cybersecurity Responsibility Act is a crucial piece of legislation that will greatly improve the cybersecurity of the 988 Lifeline network, ultimately saving lives. We look forward to working with you to advance the 9-8-8 Lifeline Cybersecurity Responsibility Act. Please contact Laura Evans, Director of National and State Policy at [levans@vibrant.org](mailto:levans@vibrant.org) for any questions about this letter or to discuss further.

Sincerely,

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Psychiatric Association  
Crisis Text Line  
Inseparable  
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

The Jed Foundation  
The Trevor Project  
Vibrant Emotional Health

CC: Members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee