

United States Senate

July 28, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny H. Hoyer
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-107, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Hoyer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We write to request that the U.S. House of Representatives immediately move to take up and pass S. 2661, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act, on the suspension calendar. S. 2661 passed the U.S. Senate on May 14, 2020 with unanimous support and once approved by the House of Representatives can be signed into law to support critical suicide prevention measures.

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 a unanimous vote on July 16, 2020 to establish the number. 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 U.S. Senate with unanimous support on May 14, 2020 and is cosponsored by a bipartisan group of 34 senators, and H.R. 4194 passed the House Energy and Commerce Committee with unanimous support on July 15, 2020 and is cosponsored by a bipartisan group of 139 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 bring up S. 2661 on the suspension calendar without further delay. Thank you for your continued support and leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

/s/Cory Gardner
United States Senator

/s/Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator