September 17, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128 United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-146A United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Leahy, Vice Chairman Shelby, Chair DeLauro, and Ranking Member Granger:

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and substance use providers, advocates, and other stakeholders is writing today to ask that you include funding for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline in the Fiscal Year 2022 Continuing Resolution, which was requested as an anomaly by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)\(^1\). This funding will provide critical resources for the network and operations of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) as it transitions to 9-8-8 on July 16, 2022. Funding will also allow the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to prepare for the new Federal Communications Commission requirement that telecommunication carriers establish a new three-digit number connecting users to the NSPL, as well as expand the use of text and chat messaging. Without this anomaly funding, the NSPL call centers would be unable to support the significant increases in call, text, and chat volume that is expected due to these upgrades.

We appreciate your leadership and the continued support from the Appropriations Committees for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and dedication to increasing access to crisis resources.

The new number, 9-8-8, for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK) is set to go live on July 16, 2022. A significant increase in contacts to the Lifeline is expected when 9-8-8 is activated: approximately nine million contacts annually are expected under a moderate volume scenario in the first year, up from 2.5 million contacts answered annually now. Significant investments are needed now to fortify and build capacity within the network to answer this anticipated increase in volume to the Lifeline and to see Congress’ vision of 9-8-8 come to fruition. Including increased funds in a Continuing Resolution will allow the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to better prepare for the increase in expected calls and fortify its network plans for the transition.

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\(^1\) Sec. ___. In addition to amounts provided by section 101, amounts are provided for “Department of Health and Human Services—Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration—Mental Health” at a rate for operations of $77,621,000, for an additional amount for carrying out section 520E-3 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 290bb-36c): Provided, That such amounts may be apportioned up to the rate for operations necessary to operate and maintain the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline program.
Moreover, increased funding to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline during this transition would support routing contacts to local crisis centers, thus helping to connect more people in crisis to local resources. The funding would also be critical to implement infrastructure upgrades to increase network capacity and in supporting specialized national services, such as national back up centers and multilingual assistance that supports the multichannel availability of 9-8-8.

We appreciate your commitment to preventing suicide in the United States and connecting individuals in suicidal or behavioral health crisis to care. We look forward to continuing to work with you to support the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom
American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology*
American Counseling Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
Association For Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Centerstone*
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Clinical Social Work Association

College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition
National Association of Social Workers
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
IC&RC
Jed Foundation, The*
The Jewish Federations of North America
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (NACBHDD)
National Association for Rural Mental Health (NARMH)
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners*
National Association of Social Workers
The Kennedy Forum
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Federation of Families
National League for Nursing
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies*
NHMH- No Health Without Mental Health
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium
RI International, Inc.

*Sdenotes affiliate membership

Sandy Hook Promise
SMART Recovery
The Kennedy Forum
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health*
The Trevor Project
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
Trust for America’s Health
Vibrant Emotional Health*
Well Being Trust

CC: House and Senate Appropriations Committee