

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 27, 2020

The Honorable Michael Doyle, Chairman
The Honorable Robert Latta, Ranking Member
House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Doyle and Ranking Member Latta,

We commend your decision to hold on hearing on our legislation, H.R. 4194, the *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act*.

Every nine minutes suicide kills someone in the United States, and for every suicide-related death there are twenty-five attempts. These are truly heartbreaking statistics, numbers that have grown every year for the last 13 years straight. As you all know, sadly, suicide hits close to home. Utah ranks fifth for the highest suicide deaths in the US. Veterans are one and a half times more likely to die from suicide than non-veterans, the suicide rate across rural America is 25 percent higher than other parts of the country, and perhaps saddest of all, the youth suicide rate climbed 56 percent in the last decade.

These are our kids, neighbors, coworkers, family members and friends. We have the power and the responsibility to reach out and help them.

Though there are many tools available to help people who are struggling with mental illness or with thoughts of suicide, some of these resources are simply too difficult to find in a time of need.

The current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline dialing code is cumbersome and hard to remember, and many people have never heard of it. Additionally, in Utah and Massachusetts, as well as many other states, there are various entities providing services but not one consolidated number to call.

After deaths of Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain, calls to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline jumped 25 percent. While the hotline number has increased access, we can do better.

This is where Congress can help.

H.R. 4194 will designate a 3-digit number, 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number for a national mental health crisis and suicide prevention hotline. The bill also allows states, if they choose, to address suicide hotline funding challenges by assessing a small fee on telecommunications services in a manner similar to emergency services. Over the summer, a call center in Massachusetts made news because there were not enough volunteers to staff it. The increase in call volume led to calls going unanswered. Imagine calling 9-1-1 when your life is on the line, and nobody picking up. This bill will help expand the life-saving

work call centers are doing right now, and every minute of every day in America.

Additionally, the bill will require the FCC to report back to Congress on the feasibility automatically including a dispatchable location to hotline operators in order to direct personnel in case of an emergency.

This bill has tremendous bipartisan support with one hundred and thirty-five cosponsors.

We recognize that this legislation alone is not a panacea. We must do more. Some mental health issues will require several different approaches. But this is an important step and one that has the potential to avert tragedy and save many lives.

Thank you for holding this important hearing. We look forward to working with you to ensure this important legislation becomes law.

Sincerely,



Chris Stewart
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress