

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Act of 2018*, WC Docket No. 18-336, Third Report and Order and Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (October 17, 2024).

Yesterday I was in California. I joined Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Becerra and Congressman Cárdenas and visited Sycamores, a community-based resource center that helps adults, children, and families through some of their darkest and most difficult times. Sycamores is rooted in Los Angeles. They know what is happening in their backyard, they know what their neighbors need, and they have mobile mental health teams ready to provide on-the-ground assistance. I got to see how they work and how they deploy when crisis calls in their community.

When the original Suicide and Crisis Lifeline was launched in 2005, it was a ten-digit number, and the system used the area code associated with your phone number to route your call so those who answered could help nearby. Back then, when most calls came from a landline, routing by area code made sense. But times change. Today, thanks to a multi-year effort of the Federal Communications Commission, the ten-digit Lifeline is now an easy-to-remember three-digit number—988—and 80 percent of the calls to 988 now come from a wireless phone.

For so many people, the area code on our wireless phones no longer matches the place where we live. That means if you have a phone number from Maryland, but moved to California, and dialed 988 in crisis, you would still be routed to a center providing assistance in Maryland. Counselors in Maryland would still do their best to assist you, but it goes without saying that they won't be in a position to connect you with local resources like Sycamores in California.

This is a mismatch we should fix. We can save more lives by getting more people who dial the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline connected to resources that are local. That is where georouting fits in. When georouting is used, wireless calls to 988 are routed to call centers based not on the area code but instead on the nearby towers that wireless calls use to connect. This provides a more accurate picture of a caller's general location, while still protecting their privacy. More importantly, georouting means those responding to 988 inquiries have a lot more knowledge of local resources and events and are better equipped to assist the caller with getting the help they need.

We have already made real headway getting georouting in place for 988 calls. The Federal Communications Commission has been working with our federal partners at the Department of Health and Human Services and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to implement this technology. Last year I kicked this effort off by writing letters to the nationwide wireless providers urging them to explore georouting with development, testing, and trials. That work has paid off, with two nationwide wireless providers launching georouting for 988 calls last month, and a third provider coming on board shortly. I am grateful for this progress. But we cannot fall back. We need to make sure everyone calling 988 from a wireless phone can get connected to help that is nearby. So today we are setting clear deadlines for wireless providers across the country to implement georouting for calls to the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Still, we are not stopping here. There is more we can do to keep improving access to 988 and making sure those who reach out in crisis get the local support they need.

Years ago, I led this agency's work to support texting to 988—expanding the Lifeline to take more than just traditional phone calls. After all, this is the primary way so many of us communicate today, especially young people. So in addition to requiring georouting for 988 calls, today we are launching a rulemaking to determine how best to implement georouting for 988 texts. Texting technology is different, and presents special challenges because texts contain unique information and move along a different pathway than calls. So while the Lifeline's Administrator can receive texts to 988, there is currently no way to also receive georouting data from the text's sender. But when there's a will,

there's a way. We are not going to stop working to improve the Lifeline until everyone gets access to the local help they need.

I want to thank Congressman Cárdenas and Secretary Becerra for joining me at Sycamores and for being such terrific champions for 988. Their drive to set up and improve the three-digit Lifeline is a big reason why we are here today. I also want to thank Senator Padilla and Senator Tillis for their support on Capitol Hill. Most of all, thank you to Sycamores for the gracious way they opened their doors for us, and for the heroic care and services they and so many others like them around the country provide to people in their community.

Finally, I am grateful for the staff responsible for this effort, including Callie Coker, Jesse Goodwin, Trent Harkrader, Heather Hendrickson, Jesse Jachman, Jodie May, Christi Shewman, and Merry Wulff from the Wireline Competition Bureau; Brenda Boykin, John Evanoff, David Furth, Timothy Hoseth, Renee Roland, Rasoul Safavian, and Rachel Wehr from the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau; Garnet Hanly, Leon Jackler, John Lockwood, and Susan Mort from the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau; Terry Cavanaugh, Douglas Klein, Richard Mallen, Erika Olsen, Elliot Tarloff, and Chin Yoo from the Office of General Counsel; Stacy Jordan, Eugene Kiselev, and Eric Ralph from the Office of Economics and Analytics; and Michael Gussow and Jocelyn James from the Office of Communications Business Opportunities.