

U.S. Sens. Baldwin, Gardner, Moran, Reed: Introduce legislation to create three-digit suicide prevention hotline

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Jack Reed (D-RI) introduced the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act to designate a three-digit phone number for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline and ensure states have the flexibility to strengthen local crisis call centers. The current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and Veterans Crisis line are 10-digits, which is a barrier to Americans in crisis seeking support. Congressman Chris Stewart (R-UT) and Seth Moulton (D-MA) are leading companion legislation in the House of Representatives.

“In America, we lose about 45,000 people every year to suicide, including more than 6,100 veterans, making it one of the leading causes of death in this country,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “We need to do everything we can to prevent suicide and that means improving the tools we have to help people who are suffering from depression or other mental health issues. I’m proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation to make it as quick and easy as possible for Americans in crisis to get the help and support they need through the National Suicide Hotline.”

“We must do more to destigmatize access to mental health resources and prevent suicides in our country. Approximately every seven hours, a Coloradan dies by suicide. As the father of three young Coloradans, it breaks my heart to know that youth suicide rates have increased by 58 percent in the last three years,” **said Senator Gardner.** “If this bipartisan idea becomes law, Americans could dial a three-digit phone number in times of any crisis: 9-1-1 for an emergency, and 9-8-8

for a mental health emergency. This legislation is more than smart policy that will help save lives, it's a statement that our government recognizes the crisis and is working across party lines to address it."

"The state of Kansas and the entire country stand to benefit from increased access to critical suicide prevention and mental health services that a dedicated nationwide hotline would offer," **said Senator Moran.** "I commend the work of my fellow Kansan Chairman Ajit Pai and the entire FCC on this important issue, and I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with the commission and my Senate colleagues to make certain this is an effective tool for those who need it."

"This is about saving lives. A nationwide, three-digit number for suicide prevention and mental health crises will connect people with the specialized help they need, when they need it. Mental health care works, and this bill will help get people into care, but it's just a first step that will require the federal government to put up real resources," **said Senator Reed.**

"The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) applauds the Senators' efforts to establish a national three-digit suicide prevention hotline number. Having an easy to remember number will ensure that individuals across the country who are in emotional distress will have ready access to crisis services that can save lives," **said American Foundation for Suicide Prevention CEO Bob Gebbia.**

"If you are in a car accident, you don't have to remember a 7-digit number to get immediate help - a mental health emergency should be no different," **said National Alliance on Mental Illness' Acting CEO Angela Kimball.** "That's why NAMI supports the introduction of both the House and Senate versions of a bill that would establish a 3-digit, easy to remember universal number for those seeking help during a mental health crisis and for suicide prevention. The creation of a nationwide '988' number could mean the difference between life and death by diverting people from the criminal justice system and instead get them the right care when they need it most."

Background:

After support from Baldwin, Gardner, Moran, and Reed, the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act was signed into law in 2018. Through implementation of this legislation, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration evaluated the potential to use a 3-digit dialing code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

In August, the FCC recommended in their [report](#) the use of a 3-digit line and the number 9-8-8. They noted that a 3-digit line would help with mental health and suicide prevention access.

The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act directs the FCC to designate 9-8-8 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This line would include the Veterans Crisis Line for veteran-specific mental health support. Additionally, the legislation will authorize the ability of states to collect fees to ensure local call centers are able to support increased volume.

This legislation is endorsed by the American Legion, National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, NowMattersNow.org, United Suicide Survivors International, Open Minds, National Association for Rural Mental Health, Mental Health America, Tourette Association of America, the Kevin & Margaret Hines Foundation, the American Telemedicine Association, the Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness, Illinois Association of Behavioral Health, Behavioral Health Association of Providers, Postpartum Support International, Education Development Center, National Board for Certified Counselors, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, Association For Ambulatory Behavioral Health, SMART Recovery, American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry, American Psychiatric Nurses Association, Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice, Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies (CIPS), 2020 Mom, the American Association of Suicidology, the American Counseling Association, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the American Psychological Association, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, Behavioral Health Link, Centerstone, Depression Association of America, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the National Association of Social Workers, the National Council for Behavioral Health, RI International, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, Mental

Health Colorado, Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, and the Trevor Project.

An online version of this release is available [here](#).