

August 08, 2023

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR JANICE HAHN

Support the Local 9-8-8 Response Act of 2023 (HR 4974)

In 2020, the federal government enacted the National Suicide Hotline Act (S 2661), which established 9-8-8 as the national number for suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotlines. 9-8-8 went live across the United States in July 2022, for the first time providing an easy-to-remember singular number to access mental health and suicide prevention call centers available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Los Angeles County (County) has worked with our local, state, and federal partners to implement 9-8-8 and connect it to mobile crisis response services. Prior to the 9-8-8 launch date, the County contracted with Didi Hirsch to run our local 9-8-8 call center and included as part of the contract the capability to transfer calls as needed to the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to dispatch mobile response teams. Additionally, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) has sponsored and supported state and federal legislation to provide funding for 9-8-8 call centers and crisis mobile response teams.

As we celebrate the one year anniversary of the launch of 9-8-8, one big challenge remains that can impede County residents from accessing mobile crisis response teams through 9-8-8. The federal legislation that created 9-8-8 designed the number to be routed to call centers based on the area code of the caller's phone number. This means that no matter where in the country someone is when they dial 9-8-8, their call will be routed based on their area code. So

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people who live in Los Angeles County but have an out-of-County area code will not be routed to Los Angeles County's call center when using 9-8-8. This becomes a significant problem when the person calling needs an in-person mobile crisis response team because only Los Angeles County's call center is set up to connect with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to dispatch teams. This has led to some confusion and frustration across the County when people have called 9-8-8 and requested an in person response team but have reached a call center outside of the County, unbeknownst to them. It has also limited DMH's ability to advertise 9-8-8 and encourage Los Angeles County residents to dial 9-8-8 when they need a mental health crisis response.

A solution to this issue is for the federal government to implement "georouting" for 9-8-8 calls. Georouting would route a 9-8-8 call to the call center geographically nearest to the caller instead of through their area code. This option would ensure that a caller gets access to their local 9-8-8 call center while also protecting their privacy by concealing their exact location, which has been a concern by many mental health advocates. For example, 9-1-1 calls use "geolocation" technology to find the precise location of the caller. Georouting is different from geolocation because it would not identify someone's exact location but would route their phone call to the nearest call center, which is ideal for 9-8-8.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has advocated for the federal government to implement georouting for 9-8-8. Last week, Congress Member Tony Cardenas introduced the Local 988 Response Act of 2023 (HR 4974) that will require the Federal Communications

Commission (FCC) to promulgate regulations requiring mobile phone carriers to route calls based on the proximity of the caller to the call center, not the area code. The bill also specifies that a caller's specific location should not be revealed or discernible. Implementing georouting for 9-8-8 will help ensure a quicker response by mental health professionals. This is especially important for Los Angeles County where approximately 15% of calls made annually to our DMH Help Line come from out-of-county area codes, which is likely a similar percentage of people calling 9-8-8 from out-of-county area codes. HR 4974 will make sure that anyone who calls 9-8-8 from within Los Angeles County will be routed to the County call center, making sure they get the response they need including in-person mobile crisis teams when appropriate. In addition, HR 4974 will require carriers to allow calls and texts to 988 even if the plan is inactive or the carrier is experiencing service interruptions or failures, and it will require multi-line systems like hotel and office phones to support the direct dialing of 988.

HR 4974 presents a much-needed solution to one of the challenges that has faced 9-8-8 in the first year of its implementation. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors should offer their support to the bill.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office's Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations Branch to:

- 1) Send a 5-signature letter in support of the Local 988 Response Act of 2023 (H.R. 4974) to U.S. Representative Tony Cárdenas (D-CA);
- 2) Send a letter to the County's Congressional Delegation encouraging them to co-sponsor

the bill; and

- 3) Advocate in support of H.R. 4974 or similar legislation.

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