

January 09, 2024

**MOTION BY SUPERVISORS JANICE HAHN
AND KATHRYN BARGER**

Support the Local 9-8-8 Response Act of 2023 (S. 3444)

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, seven 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 to dispatch mobile response teams.

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 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 to dispatch teams.

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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.

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.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) has advocated for the federal government to implement georouting for 9-8-8. In 2023, Congress Member Tony Cardenas introduced the Local 988 Response Act of 2023 (HR 4974) that would 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 Board passed a unanimous motion to support HR 4974. Since then, the Board’s legislative advocates have been working with federal partners on this legislation, including working with members of the United States Senate to introduce a companion bill in the Senate.

On December 7, 2023, U.S. Senator Alex Padilla introduced the Local 988 Response Act of 2023 (S. 3444) that would also require that calls to 9-8-8 be routed to call centers based on the proximity of the caller, not the caller’s area code. The bill would give the FCC more time to initiate the rulemaking process and issue regulations than H.R. 4974, but the ultimate outcome would be the same: implementing georouting for 9-8-8 to ensure a quicker response by mental health

professionals and requiring that the caller's privacy and specific location remain protected. Like H.R. 4974, S. 3444 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. S. 3444 offers an additional pathway to accomplish georouting for 9-8-8 calls, so the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors should offer their support to the bill.

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

1. Send 5-signature letters to U.S. Senator Alex Padilla in support of the Local 988 Response Act of 2023 (S. 3444) and to U.S. Senator Laphonza Butler to encourage her to co-sponsor S. 3444; and
2. Support efforts to move the bill through the legislative process.

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