

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3704

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March 19, 2007

Terry Cline, Ph.D., Administrator  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
United States Department of Health and Human Services  
1 Choke Cherry Road  
Rockville, MD 20857

Commissioner Kevin J. Martin  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Dr. Cline and Chairman Martin:

I am writing about an important matter affecting the availability of critical suicide prevention services in our country. As you know, suicide is a tragic problem in America. Each year more than 31,000 Americans complete suicide, and many more make attempts. It is the third leading cause of death for children and youth ages 10 to 24 and the second leading cause of death for college students. Research has shown that more than 90 percent of people who die by suicide have depression or another diagnosable mental or substance abuse disorder.

However, it has come to my attention that while we have worked to improve and create important safety nets for those who may want to harm themselves, too many are still falling through the cracks. Recently, an article ran in one of my home state newspapers, *The Oregonian*. This article recounts the problems that a woman, Judy, had finding help when she needed someone to talk to about her feelings of helplessness. She dialed a suicide prevention service that referred her to 211. The referrals did not lead her to the help she needed. Instead, they put her through a frustrating series of wrong numbers. Ultimately, Judy found help through a reporter. Her case highlights the fact that we need to do better.

Therefore, I am writing to ask you to work together to ensure that local communications systems such as the 211 and 411 systems begin carrying SAMHSA's suicide hotline, 1-800-273-TALK. This will work to ensure that when someone is in need of help, they are connected to that help. The communications systems are in place, we just need to make sure they are coordinating on the level we know they can.

I appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to hearing from you on this critical issue.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. H. Smith', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gordon H. Smith  
United States Senate