**Subject:** **VIDEO RELEASE: President Signs Gardner, Baldwin, Moran, and Reed’s 9-8-8 Suicide Hotline Bill**



**For Immediate Release**

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**President Signs Gardner, Baldwin, Moran, and Reed’s 9-8-8 Suicide Hotline Bill**

*Bipartisan bill designates 9-8-8 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline*

**Washington, D.C.**– Today the President of the United States signed S. 2661, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act, which was [introduced](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__www.gardner.senate.gov_newsroom_press-2Dreleases_gardner-2Dbaldwin-2Dmoran-2Dreed-2Dintroduce-2Dbill-2Dto-2Dcreate-2Dthree-2Ddigit-2Dsuicide-2Dhotline&d=DwMGaQ&c=L93KkjKsAC98uTvC4KvQDdTDRzAeWDDRmG6S3YXllH0&r=Xd1VbLR3gXg93HN7gP0xBXW1fnoJoAzlZuJnbYkuzxI&m=1I3unyWsNWa9DdK4ngrkhqfA1yL-1Ps_vr9_onpyHFQ&s=nIhm-czpX0XMriz9YSABGRjROLR_0qzOJGjWbMP6qQA&e=) by U.S. Senators Cory Gardner (R-CO), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Jerry Moran (R-KS), and Jack Reed (D-RI). This bipartisan legislation designates 9-8-8 as the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline, and companion legislation was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by U.S. Representatives Chris Stewart (R-UT) and Seth Moulton (D-MA).



**NOTE:** Click [here](https://sengardner.box.com/s/b5wmsy8ngoao8g7aop2cnwlbomcvxxnj) or the picture above to download Senator Gardner’s remarks.

“I applaud the President for signing my common-sense, bipartisan legislation to shorten the national suicide hotline from ten digits to three easy-to-remember numbers: 9-8-8,” **said Senator Gardner.**“Colorado tragically has one of the highest suicide rates in the country, which is why I’ve made it a priority to work with my colleagues across the aisle for years to make mental health support more available. The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased our state’s mental health needs, and during this unprecedented challenge suicide prevention is now more important than ever. This change to 9-8-8 will make it easier for Americans dealing with a crisis to access mental health support that could save their lives.”

“The easily accessible 9-8-8 dialing code will bring our nation’s mental health crisis response system into the 21st century. We thank Senator Gardner for his leadership in securing unanimous passage of the *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act* through Congress, this historic effort will save lives,” **said** **Robert Gebbia, CEO of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the nation’s largest suicide prevention organization.**

“CBHC appreciates the relentless effort it took to pass The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act. A dedicated three-digit-number for suicide prevention has been a goal of advocates for years, but it is more important than ever now considering the increased demand for behavioral health services that providers are seeing in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, where more and more people are experiencing isolation, depression, anxiety, and increased substance use. We extend our sincere thanks to Senator Cory Gardner for leading the charge to pass this historic legislation and we look forward to continued work together to ensure access to high quality behavioral health services and supports,” **said Frank Cornelia, Deputy Director of the Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council.**

“We could not be happier that the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act is being signed into law by the President,” **said Steve Kjonaas, Legislative Director of the Colorado Veterans of Foreign Wars.** “This will empower Veterans, Family Members, and Caregivers to reach the help they need in a crisis much faster and without the frustration of looking up a long and complicated phone number. Dialing 988 in the near future will be quick, reliable, and simple, as it will saves hundreds of lives each year.”

“The designation of 9-8-8 is a great step forward toward the mental health of the nation. We thank Senator Gardner and all those who helped get this to the finish line, and hope it will lead to additional future funding and support for a far more effective system of earlier, rapid, and effective intervention for all people experiencing mental health challenges and emergencies,” **said Paul Gionfriddo, President and CEO of Mental Health America.**

"As the first explicitly LGBTQ-inclusive bill to ever unanimously pass the House and Senate, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 not only makes history, but will also undoubtedly save countless lives,” **said Sam Brinton (they/them), Vice President of Advocacy and Government Affairs for The Trevor Project.** “Our research shows that 40% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered suicide in the past twelve months. This legislation addresses this crisis by requiring - for the first time - specialized services for LGBTQ youth. The Trevor Project is grateful to Senators Gardner and Baldwin and commends their leadership in championing the expansion of vital suicide prevention resources.”

Calls to the mental health crisis line in Colorado spiked 48 percent in March and April 2020 due in part to COVID-19. Roughly 60 percent of those calls to the crisis line were related to the ongoing pandemic.

The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act, S. 2661, designates 9-8-8 as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which would include the Veterans Crisis Line for veteran-specific mental health support. The current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and Veterans Crisis Line is 10-digits long, which is a barrier to Americans in crisis seeking support. The bill includes a report to improve support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) youth and other high-risk populations.

Until the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) finalizes the technical implementation of 9-8-8 as the nationwide number, anyone seeking help should still call 1-800-273-8255.

**Background:**

* The U.S. House of Representatives [passed](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/gardner-baldwin-moran-reed-stewart-moulton-applaud-house-passage-of-9-8-8-suicide-hotline-bill) S. 2661 on September 21, 2020, sending the bipartisan bill to the President’s desk.
* In September 2020, on World Suicide Prevention Day, Gardner renewed his call for the U.S. House of Representatives to [immediately take up and pass](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/gardner-recognizes-world-suicide-prevention-day) the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act to support critical suicide prevention measures and save lives.
* Gardner and Baldwin [sent a letter](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/gardner-baldwin-call-on-us-house-of-representatives-to-take-up-and-pass-9-8-8-suicide-hotline-bill) to House leadership in July 2020 calling the U.S. House of Representatives to pass S. 2661 without delay and wrote, “As our country is facing an unprecedented challenge in responding to COVID-19, this three-digit hotline would play a critical role in saving the lives of many vulnerable Americans who are facing mental health emergencies during this period of isolation and uncertainty.”
* In July 2020, [48 mental health groups](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/MHLG%20Support%20Letter%20-%20988%20%28July%202020%29.pdf) sent a letter to House leadership calling for swift passage of S. 2661 and wrote, “This bicameral, bipartisan legislation is urgently needed and, under your leadership, could save lives.”
* Every single commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) [endorsed](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/fcc-commissioners-unanimously-agree-house-should-swiftly-pass-gardners-9-8-8-suicide-hotline-bill-to-save-lives) S. 2661 at a hearing held by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation in June 2020.
* On May 13, the Senate [unanimously passed](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senate-unanimously-passes-gardners-9-8-8-suicide-hotline-bill) Gardner’s National Suicide Hotline Designation Act.
* In April 2020, Gardner [led a bipartisan, bicameral call](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/gardner-leads-bipartisan-bicameral-call-for-establishing-9-8-8-suicide-hotline-in-next-covid-19-relief-package) to include the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act in the next COVID-19 relief package.
* Gardner sent a [bipartisan letter](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/gardner-merkley-moran-reed-make-bipartisan-push-to-increase-critical-funds-for-suicide-prevention-amid-pandemic) to Senate Majority Leader McConnell and Senate Minority Leader Schumer requesting $80 million to support critical suicide prevention activities amid the public health crisis that is upending the social and financial stability of countless Americans.
* In February 2020, Gardner [held a behavioral health roundtable](https://centennialcitizen.net/stories/gardner-i-know-we-can-do-better-on-mental-health%2C294392) at the Cherry Creek Innovation Campus (CCIC) to discuss Colorado’s mental health needs and his work across the aisle to increase mental health support in Colorado.
* Gardner invited mental health advocate and [2018 Air Force Spouse of the Year Kristen Christy](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/gardner-announces-state-of-the-union-guest) from Colorado Springs to be his guest at the President’s annual State of the Union Address and highlighted the need for more mental health support in Colorado.
* In December 2019, the FCC approved a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to [designate 9-8-8 as the three-digit number](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/gardner-statement-on-the-fccs-vote-to-move-forward-with-the-9-8-8-suicide-hotline) for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline.
* The [Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation unanimously passed](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senate-committee-approves-gardners-9-8-8-suicide-hotline-bill) Senator Gardner’s bipartisan bill to designate 9-8-8 as the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in December 2019.
* [At a press conference](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/gardner-holds-press-conference-on-next-steps-for-national-9-8-8-suicide-hotline) in November with Senator Gardner, FCC Chairman Ajit Pai announced the FCC would consider establishing 9-8-8 as the national suicide prevention hotline at their meeting on December 12, 2019.
* Nearly 50 mental health organizations and veterans support [organizations announced their support and urged Congress to pass the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/support-grows-for-gardners-three-digit-suicide-hotline-bill).
* In November 2019, Gardner [met with Rocky Mountain Crisis Partners](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/gardner-discusses-9-8-8-hotline-with-rocky-mountain-crisis-partners) in Denver to discuss his bipartisan push to establish the three-digit hotline, which the organization said “will definitely be easier to remember and will result in significant utilization for a whole continuum of questions and needs related to behavioral health.”
* In October 2019, Senators Gardner, Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Jerry Moran (R-KS), and Jack Reed (D-RI) introduced S. 2661, the [National Suicide Hotline Designation Act](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/gardner-baldwin-moran-reed-introduce-bill-to-create-three-digit-suicide-hotline), which designates 9-8-8 for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline and ensures states have the flexibility to strengthen local crisis call centers. The bill ensures states are able to collect fees for the line, similar to the way they do for the 911 emergency line, and requires reports to Congress to help ensure effectiveness and operability of the line.
* During his annual [Colorado Farm Tour](https://www.gardner.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/gardner-visits-eastern-colorado-ag-producers-on-annual-farm-tour), Gardner held a roundtable in Julesburg regarding rural healthcare and mental health needs in rural areas in August 2019.
* In August 2019, the FCC released their [report](https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-359095A1.pdf), which found that a national three-digit line would improve suicide prevention and recommended a simple number that Americans could dial in times of crisis: 9-8-8.
* In July 2019, Gardner participated in the [Voices for Awareness](https://www.gjsentinel.com/news/western_colorado/speaking-out-about-substance-abuse/article_53ea0c7a-b1bc-11e9-9441-20677ce05640.html) event at Colorado Mesa University about the need to destigmatize mental health support and suicide prevention services.
* In April 2019, Gardner held a roundtable in Mesa County focused on teen suicide rates in Colorado and what the federal government can do to support students.
* In 2018, Gardner voted for the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act, which directed the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to evaluate using a three-digit dialing code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

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*Cory Gardner is a member of the U.S. Senate serving Colorado. He sits on the Energy & Natural Resources Committee, the Foreign Relations Committee, the Commerce, Science, & Transportation Committee, and is the Chairman of the Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy.*