

The Local 9-8-8 Response Act

Bipartisan legislation introduced by Senators Thom Tillis (R-NC) and Alex Padilla (D-CA)

A photograph of a call center with several workers wearing headsets and talking on the phone. The image is overlaid with a blue semi-transparent box containing text.

This bipartisan bill improves access to and accuracy of 9-8-8 response by:

- Requiring the FCC to route calls based on the proximity of the caller to the call center, not the area code. The bill specifies that a caller's specific location should not be revealed or discernible.
- Requiring carriers to allow calls and texts to 9-8-8 even if the plan is inactive or the carrier is experiencing service interruptions or failures, just as they currently do for 911 calls.
- Requiring multi-line systems like hotel and office phones to support the direct dialing of 9-8-8; rather than requiring a caller to dial 9 or another number before dialing 9-8-8.

Significant progress has been made in increasing access to quality mental health care in America. **The bipartisan 9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline has been critical for supporting Americans in crisis, however, continuous investments and improvement are needed to fully realize the value of a rapid and localized response for individuals in crisis.** Currently, the 9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline routes callers to crisis centers based on the device area code, not necessarily where the individual is actually calling from. This presents major challenges in connecting those in crisis with local resources, resulting in unnecessary delays in receiving care.

The Local 9-8-8 Response Act eliminates barriers to care and seeks to improve access to and accuracy of mental health crisis response through the 9-8-8 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. By requiring calls and messages to the lifeline to be routed by the call center geographically nearest to the caller, rather than by area code, we can ensure a quicker, localized, and more appropriate response. The Local 9-8-8 Response Act would eliminate an unnecessary handoff by connecting callers directly to the nearest call center, while ensuring privacy protections, so those in crisis receive the care they need as quickly and safely as possible.