

360 South Third Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215-5485
614.227.2700

fightpovertyohio.org



May 14, 2021

Senate Finance Committee
Senate Building
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Senator Dolan and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

United Way of Central Ohio expresses its unwavering support to include \$2 million of funding for the 2-1-1 program in the FY 2022-2023 State Operating Budget. State funding would sustain current services and expand 2-1-1 to counties with limited or without 2-1-1 access across Ohio (36 counties). Funding would be provided to United Way of Greater Cleveland and the Ohio Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS).

2-1-1 is a free, 24/7/365 service for individuals Ohio. Live 2-1-1 navigators receive calls from individuals and match the callers' needs to available resources in their community such as employment, food, housing, utility assistance, counseling, substance use treatment, legal, tax preparation, and health care. There are 13 2-1-1 providers across the state, including five United Ways in Ohio (Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Toledo, and Summit).


As you are aware, even though communities are returning to a new normal, the psychological, emotional, and financial impacts of the pandemic will continue over the next few years. The pandemic created an increased need for health, mental health, substance use, employment, and social services, highlighting the necessity for 2-1-1 access statewide. Rates of anxiety, depression, overdoses, and suicides have increased since the onset of the pandemic. May 2020 was the deadliest month for overdoses in Ohio in 14 years with [520 deaths](#), and since the pandemic began, [26.5 people per week](#) were admitted to emergency rooms for suspected suicides in Ohio.

In 2020, Ohio's 2-1-1s handled over 830,000 requests for help from residents across Ohio. Families reached out to 2-1-1 for assistance in a variety of areas, including 239,000 requests for food, 135,000 requests for help with housing, and 121,000 requests for mental health or substance abuse treatment. Without connection to 2-1-1, these individuals may have ended up in emergency rooms, shelters, or other costly state programs.

When people are connected to care at the onset of a crisis, they can recover more quickly and become more self-sufficient. Moreover, neighboring states have invested state funds to 2-1-1 including Indiana and Michigan at \$1 million annually and Pennsylvania at \$750,000 annually to serve approximately 400,000 callers.

2-1-1 [saves lives](#) and [state funds](#). Connection to social services keeps people out of the hospital and in their communities with their families. We urge you to support this critical budget request to help aid in the health, emotional, and financial recovery of our communities and state.

Respectfully,


Lisa S. Courtice, Ph.D.
President & CEO