

**Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services Hearing**  
**Interested Party Testimony from United Way of Greater Cleveland on House Bill 33**  
**Submitted March 15, 2023**



Good morning Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and other distinguished members of the Ohio House of Representatives. Thank you for convening this budget hearing for the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services and for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 33.

My name is Sharon Sobol Jordan, President and Chief Executive Officer of United Way of Greater Cleveland, which manages the 211 program for Cuyahoga, Geauga, Ross, Darke, and Belmont counties. United Way of Greater Cleveland's 211 program is a nationally recognized leader because of its robust program model and database which includes 2,200 agencies with over 13,000 services. Live navigators are available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year and receive requests from callers, access the database of resources, match the callers' needs to available resources, and link or refer them directly to an agency that can help. Some services people are connected to include employment, food, housing, and utility assistance, mental health counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, legal assistance, veteran's services, tax preparation, and health care.

I am here today to urge you to include \$2,000,000 in support for Ohio's 211 network in House Bill 33. We are one of fourteen 211's across the state and in 2022 alone, our collective 211 programs served over 810,000 callers and an additional 52,000 texts, chats, and emails, each with multiple and intersecting needs. Ohio's 211 network serves more people than neighboring states with similar populations including Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Illinois. Moreover, Ohio's 211 network has over 107,000 services in its database, making it one of the largest referral resources in the nation, second only to California.<sup>1</sup>

We applaud the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services and Governor DeWine for prioritizing robust investments into Ohio's health and human services in House Bill 33, including your support of publicly funded childcare, the childcare workforce, affordable housing, lead abatement, and health and behavioral health services. An investment in Ohio's 211 network is critical to making these other services work for Ohio residents and communities in three important ways.

**1. Connecting People in Crisis to Vital Services in Real Time:**

The delivery system that exists to meet these needs of Ohioans is complex and difficult to navigate, particularly in a crisis. Ohio's 211 network helps people and families quickly navigate those systems through an easy number— just by dialing 2-1-1. Ohio's 211 network covers most of the state and is available to anyone seeking help free of charge 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. Because 211 is the largest provider of information and referral services in Ohio, it is an excellent channel for Ohio governmental agencies, businesses, and others to connect vital programs and services to people that urgently need them. As an example, Ohio's fourteen 211 operators came together during the pandemic to serve as a vaccine hotline for the entire

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.211.org/about-us/our-impact>

state, even in areas where 211s do not currently exist. We created that capacity together. Moreover, 211 saves lives<sup>2</sup> and state funds.<sup>3</sup> When people are connected to care at the onset of a crisis, they can recover quickly and become more self-sufficient. Neighboring states have invested annual state funds into 211 including Indiana,<sup>4</sup> Michigan,<sup>5</sup> and Pennsylvania.<sup>6</sup> We are asking the same of Ohio.

## **2. Data Trends:**

Not only do we connect people to needed services, but we watch the data trends to better respond to urgent needs, and work to eliminate the causes and further crises. The top needs from Ohio callers in 2022 were food, followed by housing, and utilities. United Way of Greater Cleveland's 211 program responded by:

- Saving callers over \$1.1 million in prescription drug costs, which helped people get the prescriptions they need to maintain their health at an affordable price and avoid more costly healthcare interventions due to lack of access to prescription drugs.
- Preventing utility shut offs for over 4,700 residents and connecting them to \$526,000 in utility assistance, which kept people safe and in their homes.
- Connecting over 9,500 individuals to food assistance programs, totaling a value of over \$328,000 in food support, which helped families and individuals stay healthy and nourished.
- Serving over 3,600 veterans and connecting them to employment, food, counseling, and VA benefits.

## **3. Greater Effectiveness and Efficiency of the 211 Network:**

Ohio's 211 network of 14 separate operators are collaborating more than ever to share resources and eliminate duplication of effort. Having a shared funding source through annual, ongoing state funding would accelerate this collaboration to find efficiencies of scale, make the social services ecosystem more efficient, build capacity for statewide 211 service, and facilitate more complex care coordination.

We greatly support the administration and legislature's goals and dedication to Ohio's thriving economy and creating a vibrant future for all Ohioans. We appreciate that these efforts include meaningful investments into health, mental health, economic development, workforce development, education, and children. Ohio's financial security and overall economy depends upon the ability of Ohio residents to access health, behavioral health, and social services when they need them to quickly alleviate the crisis and keep them on the path to self-sufficiency. A \$2,000,000 state investment into Ohio's 211 network would promote and support the state government's health, human service, and economic development goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2020/04/06/coronavirus-milwaukee-calls-211-helpline-double-during-pandemic/5102379002/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://nj211.org/cost-savings-211>; <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2020/04/06/coronavirus-milwaukee-calls-211-helpline-double-during-pandemic/5102379002/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://thestatehousefile.com/21890/new-law-211-service-to-receive-state-funding-for-the-first-time/21890/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://mi-psc.force.com/sfc/servlet.shepherd/version/download/068t0000000wCCEAA2>

<sup>6</sup> <http://lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/Resources/Documents/Reports/671.pdf>

*Contacts for Follow Up:*

- Sharon Sobol Jordan, President & CEO, [sjordan@unitedwaycleveland.org](mailto:sjordan@unitedwaycleveland.org)
- Kenneth Surratt, VP, Community Investment & Chief Community Investment Officer, [ksurratt@unitedwaycleveland.org](mailto:ksurratt@unitedwaycleveland.org)
- Franco Formichelli, Director 2-1-1 HelpLink, [fformichelli@unitedwaycleveland.org](mailto:fformichelli@unitedwaycleveland.org)

