

Ohio 211 Helps Ohioans Find Essential Community Services | Tanya Kahl, United Way of Summit & Medina and Ohio 211 Board

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee.

My name is Tanya Kahl. I serve as a board member of Ohio 211 and as Associate Vice President of 211 and Housing at United Way of Summit & Medina.

Ohio's 211 system does not receive state funds. Instead, each of the 14 affiliates raises a combination of local and philanthropic funds, including \$2 million from Ohio United Ways. Nevertheless, in 2022 alone, 211 programs across Ohio responded to 810,000 calls and 52,000 texts, chats and emails with multiple and intersecting needs. We received:

- 149,687 food assistance calls,
- 138,725 housing assistance calls,
- 81,287 utility assistance calls,
- 47,892 mental health and substance use calls, and
- 24,122 health care calls

Other Ohioans contacted 211 for help with employment, transportation, tax preparation, and legal issues. We use bilingual staff and telephonic interpretation services to meet the linguistic needs in our communities as they change, such as refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Here are a few highlights from my local service area:

My 211 currently serves eight counties in Northeast Ohio, centered in Summit County, extending into Lorain, Medina, and Portage Counties, and south into Tuscarawas, Carroll, Harrison, and Jefferson Counties. I have wonderful local partners in every community that help my regional 211 center meet local community needs. We also partner closely with the local Departments of Job and Family Services to promote workforce development.

Last week, we made a presentation to employees at one of our local companies about 211, emphasizing resources we can provide to help people stay employed. After the presentation, one of the employees came up to my staff to talk about his situation. He said he was close to having several utilities shut off because he had gotten behind on his bills while he was out of work. She gave him specific instructions to contact a program that provides help with water bills on his lunch break that day and helped him make an appointment with an agency for help with his electric bill the following day. He received help with both utilities and was so appreciative. It is challenging for people to know what help is available and how to access that help. That is why 211 is so important.

Prior to January 1 of this year, my 211 also served Stark County. We responded to an average of 45 requests for help daily from Stark County residents. The local sponsor for the program

ended 211 service on December 31, 2022. With so many pressing needs in their community, the organization couldn't shoulder the cost of 211 alone. We saw the same thing a few years ago in Erie County. I am confident that Stark County and Erie County would still have 211 service if this state funding had been in place. By matching United Ways' investment in 211, state funding will stabilize the 211 network in Ohio and enable increased coordination between our 14 regional 211 centers and the State of Ohio.

This critical investment of state dollars will enable us to connect the over 11 million Ohioans to the help they need, which can be both lifesaving and offset future state costs. Thank you.