

Ohio Senate Health Committee Hearing
Interested Party Testimony from United Way of Greater Cleveland on House Bill 33
Submitted May 10, 2023



Good morning Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and other distinguished members of the Ohio Senate. Thank you for convening this hearing for the Health Committee 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 2,700 agencies with over 16,000 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 in House Bill 33 \$2,000,000 in support for Ohio's 211 network. 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 with multiple and intersecting needs. Ohio's 211 program serves more people than neighboring states with similar populations including Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Illinois. Moreover, Ohio's 211 program has over 107,000 services in its database, the second largest number of services in its 211 database after California.¹ The top needs from Ohio callers in 2022 were food, followed by housing, and utilities.

We applaud the Ohio General Assembly and Governor DeWine for including robust investments into Ohio's health and human service system in House Bill 33, including investments into publicly funded childcare, the childcare workforce, affordable housing, lead abatement, and health and behavioral health services. An investment in 211 makes these health and human service programs work for Ohio residents and communities in three important ways:

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

The needs of Ohioans are multidimensional and intersecting. The delivery system that exists to meet these needs is complex and difficult to navigate, particularly in a crisis. 211 helps community members quickly navigate those systems through an easy number. Ohio's 211 network covers most of the state and is available to anyone seeking help free of charge 24/7/365. Because 211 is the largest provider of information and referral services in Ohio, it is an excellent channel for Ohio governmental and other organizations to connect vital programs and services to people that urgently need them. As an example, we came together during the pandemic to serve as a vaccine hotline for the entire state, even in areas where 211s do not currently exist. We created that capacity.



Moreover, 211 serves as a vital resource to communities during emergencies and disasters, and 211 assists as a backup line to 911 when the emergency line cannot handle any additional calls. This proved to be especially important after the East Palestine train derailment when local 911 operators were unable to handle the influx of calls, and 211 helped community members get the information and resources they needed. In addition, local legislators in East Palestine encouraged community members to call 211 for assistance.ⁱⁱ

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. Last year alone, 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 is comprised of 14 separate operators that 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.

Moreover, 211 saves livesⁱⁱⁱ and state funds.^{iv} 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^v and Michigan^{vi} and Pennsylvania.^{vii} We are asking the same of Ohio.

We greatly support the administration and legislatures goals and dedication to Ohio's thriving economy and creating a vibrant future for all Ohioans, including meaningful investments into health, mental health, economic development, workforce development, higher education, and children. Ohio's financial security and overall economy is dependent on community members getting access to health, behavioral health, and social services when they need them, so they quickly bounce back and become more self-sufficient. 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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i <https://www.211.org/about-us/our-impact>

ii <https://www.wkbn.com/news/local-news/in-depth-interview-how-211-can-help-those-seeking-resources/>

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

iv <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/>

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

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

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