



**UNITED WAY  
SUMMIT & MEDINA**

**House Children and Human Services Budget Testimony**

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On behalf of United Way of Summit & Medina (UWSM), I am submitting written testimony to express support for DCY's goals of reducing the infant mortality rate in Ohio and improving kindergarten readiness and subsequent reading on grade level by third grade. These are two of our four bold goals, and we are working hand in hand at the local level to move the needle on these items. UWSM was an initial recipient of DCY's Faith and Community Based grant program to support healthy babies and we are using those funds to provide short-term assistance to help low-income families remain housed during their maternity leave from work.

I also want to raise awareness of 211 as a key service that supports families in Ohio and to advocate for state funding of Ohio 211 during the budget process. 211 is a free, 24/7/365 helpline that serves as a bridge between Ohioans in need and agencies that can help. In 2024, Ohio 211 handled over 800,000 calls from Ohioans across Ohio through a network of regional 211s. Yet Ohio 211 does not currently receive any state funding, which has led to 30 counties in Ohio not having 211 service and other counties at-risk of losing the service due to reductions in charitable donations at the local level.

As you consider the state budget for DCY and JFS, I want to emphasize just a few key points:

- As an easy to remember three-digit dialing code, 211 is the ideal entry point for Ohio families to access all the services offered through DCY. By maximizing the ability for 211 to screen Ohio families for various preventive services when they call 211 about basic needs, 211 can help DCY reach more people at a lower cost and move the needle on DCY's key priorities.
- Our regional 211 centers maintain the most comprehensive database of nonprofit and government services in the state. With state support, Ohio 211 will provide an online search for families, DCY funded programs, and other helping professionals throughout the state to access our resource database. We have provided an online search for our region for many years and is a tremendous tool that increases the efficiency of social workers, school staff, hospitals, and nonprofit organization staff in doing their work. Bringing this online search statewide will triple the number of Ohioans we can reach.
- 211 is a critical service just like 988 and 911. 211 helps prevent people from being in crisis, relieving the burden on the costlier 988 and 911 systems.
- 211 is a service that benefits urban and rural communities. 211 helps bridge the digital divide among Ohioans with limited access to technology.
- Ohio is only one of three states in the US that does not have statewide 211 coverage and the reason for this is our local communities cannot bear the full cost of the service. That is why every one of the states surrounding Ohio and most states across the country provide state funding for 211. We are asking for an investment in state dollars to enable this private-public partnership to thrive.