

House Finance Committee Testimony on HB 96, Amendment HC0524-1

Ryan Aroney, President and CEO

United Way of Greater Lorain County

Chair Stewart, Vice-Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on HB 96. My name is Ryan Aroney, and I am the President and CEO of United Way of Greater Lorain County. I am here to testify in support of Amendment HC0524-1, which will provide \$2 million in state funding annually to support 211 service across Ohio.

For those of you who are not aware, 211 is a 24-hour helpline that connects Ohioans to essential nonprofit and government services such as food, housing, workforce development, and mental health services. Last year, the network of 14 regional 211 centers handled over 785,000 requests for help from Ohioans in need. Currently, 211 in Ohio is funded entirely at the local level, which has resulted in 30 counties in Ohio not having 211 service. State funding is needed to stabilize the existing counties with 211 service and to expand 211 statewide.

I'd like to share a few stories about why our United Way supports 211 and why I feel you should too.

At United Way of Greater Lorain County, we believe it is important to try to make it easier for individuals in our community that fall on hard times to find out what help is available. If you are dealing with a reduction in your hours at work or a sudden health issue and you just need a little help, it should not be hard to find that help. It is more efficient for both the people in need of help and the nonprofit organizations in the community to have a designated 211 service rather than people calling everywhere to try to find the help they need.

211 has been a critical support in our community during several different storms that resulted in serious flooding. Our local EMA is a small office and they didn't have the staff to field thousands of phone calls. Instead, 211 took these incoming calls and collected the basic information needed both to determine where resources needed to be deployed and whether the damages were enough to qualify for federal assistance. It made a huge difference to have 211 support for our EMA.

We have also been able to utilize 211 to support various initiatives that are important to our United Way and our local community. For example, 211 schedules free tax appointments in support of our VITA program. This is a very efficient way to connect people to this service that results in millions of dollars flowing back into Ohio from the Earned Income Tax Credit.

211 is also a great source of data on community needs. We used 211 to gather data on unmet transportation needs to determine how to best focus efforts of our Mobility Manager, a partnership with the State of Ohio. 211 data helps us determine where to invest our charitable dollars.

I want to wrap up by emphasizing that 211 is a critical service that benefits both urban, rural, and suburban communities and is especially helpful to families with children, senior citizens, and Veterans.

State investment in 211 is needed to sustain this public-private partnership and make 211 statewide. I encourage your support of Amendment HC0524-1. We are asking for a modest \$2 million, less than 20% of the cost to operate 211 in Ohio. That is a great investment of state dollars and will enable this private-public partnership to thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.