



Ohio 211 Introduction and Statewide Coalition | Hailey Barr – United Way of Greater Cincinnati

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee thank you for your leadership and for allowing me to provide written testimony today.

I am Hailey Barr, and I have the privilege of living in Butler County and working in Hamilton County at United Way of Greater Cincinnati (UWGC). I work on public policy and advocacy initiatives on behalf of the organization.

I write today to testify in support of state funding for Ohio 211. 211 launched nationally 25 years ago in 2000, and the service was launched in Ohio just one year later in 2001. United Ways operates five call centers in Ohio, and other nonprofit organizations and a public library run the others across the state.

Ohio 211 Providers include:

Area Agency on Aging 3	Ashtabula County Community Action Agency
Fairfield County 211	Mansfield Richland County Public Library
Lutheran Social Services 211 Central Ohio	Help Network of Northeast
Ohio Helpline of Delaware Morrow County	Lifeline, Inc.
Pathways of Central Ohio	United Way of Greater Cincinnati
United Way of Greater Cleveland	United Way of Greater Dayton Area
United Way of Summit & Medina	United Way of Greater Toledo

Ohio 211 lives in the same ecosystem as 911 and 988 with 911 being used for emergency services and 988 being used for mental health services. 211 is the number to call for other needs, such as housing, utility assistance, child care, transportation, and other vital services in our communities.

By dialing 211, Ohioans can speak with a 211 team member who can refer them to any number of resources from their robust databases. No matter the situation, 211 staff listen, identify underlying problems, and connect people in need with community resources and services that improve their well-being. **In 2024 alone, Ohio 211 served over 786,000 Ohioans.**

As of today, Ohio 211 lacks the revenue needed to cover all 88 counties in the state. In fact, people in 30 counties aren't able to access 211 resources, meaning millions of Ohioans don't have the support they desperately need.

This could be mitigated with support from the State of Ohio. Ohio's 211 system does not currently receive state funds. Instead, the 14 affiliates operate through a combination of local and philanthropic funding. An investment from the State would allow Ohio 211 to expand service in areas that currently lack coverage. With enhanced capacity, existing providers could assume higher call volumes.

Neighboring states, including Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania all provide state funding for 211.

Ohio 211 is a necessary service for Ohioans. For decades, 211 has provided neighbors an opportunity to connect with a trained professional who can answer each inquiry thoughtfully and provide updated information.

Before closing out, I'd like to share with you a story. The story you'll read is just one of over 50,000 stories made possible by UWGC's 211-service each year.

When Brenda, 56, had to stop working after being diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer, she fell behind on her rent and utilities. Navigating the social services system, she said, was "a nightmare." Then, someone suggested she call 211. When Brenda dialed 211, she reached a trained professional at UWGC who connected her with organizations that helped with rent and utilities.

With 211's help, Brenda caught up on her bills and avoided homelessness. There are thousands of stories just like Brenda's, but our services expand beyond just a "Yellow Pages for social services." We are now a hub for connecting families to services and programs. Our programs include:

- **Free Tax Prep:** A collaboration with the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program.
- **Access to Counsel:** A partnership with the City of Cincinnati, Legal Aid, the Help Center, and the University of Cincinnati, providing rent assistance and legal aid to prevent evictions.
- **Project Lift:** A financial empowerment initiative offering short-term assistance, coaching, and workforce development.

Through electronic referrals, 211 can connect families to services seamlessly. In fact, thanks to our modern infrastructure, UWGC's 211 was able to step up and assist LA 211 during the Los Angeles fires when their call volumes for help skyrocketed.

However, we can't provide the same disaster support in our own state. Ohio is nearly singular in the nation in lacking full 211 coverage. **We are asking for \$2 million annually in state funding to support Ohio 211 because Ohio families and residents should have access to the services they need.**

Thank you for taking the time to hear from me today. I greatly appreciate your leadership.