



**UNITED WAY
SUMMIT & MEDINA**

**Ohio House
Finance Committee
March 13, 2025**

Interested Party Testimony on HB 96

On behalf of United Way of Summit & Medina (UWSM), I am submitting written testimony to express support for many of the administration's priorities in the state budget including the focus on continuing to fund programs focused on reducing infant mortality and improving kindergarten readiness and reading on grade level by third grade. These are two of our four bold goals at UWSM, and we are working hand in hand at the local level to move the needle in these areas. State funding for programs such as the Siemer TANF program, the Ohio Housing Trust Fund, and ODM and DCY funding that is awarded to local communities to address infant mortality are key to organizations like ours being able to raise matching private dollars to advance state priorities.

I also want to raise awareness of 211 as a key service that supports families in Ohio and to advocate for your **support of amendment HC0524-1** to provide \$2 million per year in DCY funding for Ohio 211 in the House version of the budget. This funding will enable Ohio 211 to expand statewide, stabilize current 211 services, and increase capacity for Ohio 211 to partner with the state on its initiatives. 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 785,000 contacts 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, 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 Ohioans statewide to access the many programs funded through the state budget and provided by nonprofits and churches. It is hard to ask for help, but 211 offers compassionate and confidential help that makes it a little easier.
- Our regional 211 centers maintain the most comprehensive database of nonprofit and government services in the state currently totaling more than 11,000 organizations and 73,000 services. State funding will enable Ohio 211 to provide an online search to help Ohio families and staff of programs funded by the state like home visitors and school counselors to access our resource database. Bringing our resource databases online will likely triple the number of Ohioans we can help.
- 211 provides critical resource navigation during disasters and eases demand on the costlier 911 and 988 services by supporting Ohioans before they are in crisis.
- 211 is a service that benefits all Ohioans including urban, rural, and suburban communities.
- 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.

**Annie McFadden
Interim President and CEO, United Way of Summit & Medina**