

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Health Committee, thank you for thoughtful consideration of my testimony today. My name is Melissa Clark and I serve as the Interim Executive Director at LSS 211 Central Ohio which serves our capital city, Columbus and the surrounding areas in Franklin County.

In Central Ohio for nearly 60 years, 211 has been a consistent and reliable provider of information and referral services in some form or fashion assisting people in crisis with their basic needs. LSS 211 is a free, confidential service available throughout Franklin County. With just one call, text, web chat, or self-guided web search, LSS 211 provides immediate access to more than 3,000 local programs.

Unfortunately, in the last year, our public support has decreased by 30% and a major funder decreased support by 50%. During this same period the need for our services has risen with the number of contacts increasing 8%, however our capacity to respond to that increase has not. As a result of the loss of funding, call center operating hours had to be reduced from 24/7/365 to 8am-8pm Monday-Friday. In addition, staffing in the call center was reduced by three FTE's.

Access to 211 is available to all members of the community and serves as a lifeline for those in need. To risk losing this service and not being there when someone needs guidance, and a helping hand would greatly hurt this community. I will leave you with a sample of the requests received via email in recent weeks from those seeking assistance.

- *"Desperately need rental assistance"*
- *"I badly need help with my nutrition. I don't have enough food at the moment, and surviving on a poor diet has made me weak. This is quite a serious situation now."*
- *"My wife and two children have gone through an unfortunate circumstance and are found homeless. Me and my wife both are hardworking, respectful adults. We just want to provide for our kids but we need help."*
- *"I am homeless and need a place to stay so I can get a job and go to work."*
- *"...reaching out in regards to any resources that will prevent me and my baby from homelessness. I'm a single mom recovering from domestic violence."*
- *"I am looking for assistance with my utilities"*
- *"I am looking for a food pantry that will deliver to a 64 year old disabled member who lives in Columbus"*

I hope to have your support to fund Ohio 211 in this budget cycle. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.