



**Ohio House Finance Committee
Interested Party Written Testimony
Submitted April 14, 2021**

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and other distinguished members of the Ohio House of Representatives. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 110.

My name is Vince Brancaccio, President Ohio AIRS (Alliance of Information and Referral Systems).

We request the House Finance Committee to support the inclusion of \$4 million of funding for 2-1-1 In the FY 2022-2023 State Operating Budget for United Way of Greater Cleveland and Ohio AIRS. State funding would expand 2-1-1 to counties with limited or without 2-1-1 access across Ohio as well as support existing counties 211 services.

Ohio AIRS is a private, non-profit membership organization dedicated to ensuring quality information and referral (I&R) services throughout Ohio. Information and referral, commonly referred to as I&R, is a unique process of assessment and information-giving that enables people to make informed decisions about accessing community resources.

Ohio AIRS is the state affiliate of the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS), an international professional association of information and referral providers. A voluntary Board of Directors , elected by the membership, oversees the operation of the organization.

Information and referral services have been available in Ohio since 1963. Many I&R services were started in the early 1970s as grass roots efforts to connect citizens with the various human services available and to assist citizens in navigating the often confusing and complex choices. Today, most of Ohio's 88 counties have some form of information & referral service.

When the pandemic hit last March, Ohio AIRS collaborated with the Ohio EMA and Ohio Department of Health to set up disaster coverage for the 36 counties in Ohio that did not have any 2-1-1 service at that time. These counties are all rural counties – many of which have some of the highest poverty rates in our State. Throughout the pandemic, the thirteen regional 2-1-1s throughout Ohio have continuously updated our resource databases to reflect service closures, changes to service delivery, and new services. We have responded to the constantly changing needs in our communities, including coordinating new services such as delivering food to high-risk populations or scheduling vaccines for seniors who were having trouble using online scheduling systems.

In 2020, Ohio's 2-1-1s handled over 830,000 requests for help from residents across every county in Ohio. Families reached out to 2-1-1 for assistance in a variety of areas, including 239,000 requests for food, 135,000 requests for help with housing, and 121,000 requests for mental health or substance

abuse treatment. Without connection to 2-1-1, these individuals may have ended up in emergency rooms, shelters, or other costly state programs.

As you are aware, even though schools and businesses are reopening and communities are returning to a new normal, the psychological, emotional, and financial impacts of the pandemic will continue over the next few years. The pandemic created an increased need for help with finding food, affordable housing, access to healthcare, mental health, substance use treatment, employment, and other social services. All these highlight the necessity for 2-1-1 access statewide.

When people are connected to care at the onset of a crisis, they can recover more quickly and become more self-sufficient when they have access to information and resources to their communities. Moreover, neighboring states have invested state funds into 2-1-1 including Indianaⁱ and Michiganⁱⁱ at \$1,000,000 annually and Pennsylvania at \$750,000 annually.ⁱⁱⁱ

2-1-1 saves lives^{iv} and state funds.^v Connection to social services keeps people out of the hospital and in their communities with their families. We urge you to support this critical budget request to help aid in the health, emotional, and financial recovery of our communities and state.

For any additional questions or information, I can be reached at vbrancaccio@helpnetworkneo.org

ⁱ <https://thestatehousefile.com/21890/new-law-211-service-to-receive-state-funding-for-the-first-time/21890/>

ⁱⁱ <https://mi-psc.force.com/sfc/servlet.shepherd/version/download/068t0000000wCCEAA2>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/Resources/Documents/Reports/671.pdf>

^{iv} <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2020/04/06/coronavirus-milwaukee-calls-211-helpline-double-during-pandemic/5102379002/>

^v <https://nj211.org/cost-savings-211>