

Ohio Senate Finance Committee Hearing
Interested Party Testimony from United Way of Greater Cleveland on Am. Sub. House Bill 110
Submitted May 10, 2021



Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and other distinguished members of the Ohio Senate, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on Amended Substitute House Bill 110.

My name is August Napoli, President and Chief Executive Officer of United Way of Greater Cleveland, which manages the 24/7/365 2-1-1 HelpLink for Cuyahoga, Geauga, Ross, and Darke counties. Our 2-1-1 HelpLink is a nationally recognized leader because of its robust program model and database which includes 2,700 agencies with over 16,000 services. Live navigators receive requests from callers, access the database of resources, match the callers' needs to available resources, and link or refer them directly to an agency that can help. Some services people are connected to include employment, food, housing, and utility assistance, mental health counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, legal assistance, veteran's services, tax preparation, and health care.

United Way of Greater Cleveland and the Ohio Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) urge Chair Dolan and the Senate Finance Committee to include \$2 million in biennial state budget funding to support current 2-1-1 programs and expand 2-1-1 to counties with limited or without 2-1-1 access across Ohio. Currently, Ohio counties without 2-1-1 access are some of the most marginalized communities in the state. This includes areas with the highest poverty rates,ⁱ highest unintentional drug overdose death rates,ⁱⁱ and highest unemployment rates in Ohio.ⁱⁱⁱ With sufficient state funding, all Ohioans will be able to call 2-1-1, an easy to remember number to get connected to much needed services that will help themselves and their communities recover.

We applaud the legislature and Governor DeWine for including robust investments into Ohio's health, behavioral health, and social service systems. However, if people do not know how to access these services or where to go to for help, the impact of these programs and state investments will be limited. The social service and healthcare systems are incredibly complex, and 2-1-1 helps community members quickly navigate those systems through an easy number. Our navigators are experts in identifying an individual's needs and expediently connecting them to the right service that can best help them.

As communities return to a new normal, the psychological, emotional, and financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will continue over the next few years. 2-1-1 has historically been an essential lifeline in communities and is an integral part of local community and state recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the existing disparities in our communities and the necessity of 2-1-1 connecting individuals to needed health, behavioral health, and social services.

During economic recessions, individuals who are unable to find employment need connections to health and social services. Moreover, high unemployment rates have historically correlated with an increase in mental health needs and overdose deaths.^{iv} Ohio's overdose rates increased during COVID. Statewide, May 2020 was the deadliest month for overdoses in 14 years with 520 deaths.^v Attempted suicides also increased statewide since March 2020. Data from the Ohio Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that since the pandemic began, 26.5 people per week were admitted to emergency rooms for suspected suicides.^{vi} National depression and anxiety rates have increased by 30 percent in 2020 in comparison to 2019.^{vii} In addition, adults in households with job loss or lower incomes report higher rates of symptoms of mental illness than those without job



or income loss. Even when people are not specifically calling 2-1-1 to address their mental health needs, 2-1-1 navigators can ask callers if they would like to be connected to the Ohio CareLine who can assess and connect them to behavioral healthcare in their community. In 2020 alone, 3,000 UWGC 2-1-1 callers were connected to behavioral health services.^{viii}

In March 2020, UWGC 2-1-1 navigators fielded a record 14,755 calls and served a total of 136,914 people with 178,014 needs in 2020. Navigators connected individuals to services such as food pantries and rental assistance, which kept people safe, healthy, and in their homes. Moreover, the top needs from UWGC 2-1-1 callers in 2020 were housing (20%), followed by food (18%), and utilities (13%). Without connection to 2-1-1, these individuals may have ended up in the emergency room, a homeless shelter, or other costly state systems. These individuals might have never received social services and are unfamiliar with getting connected to care. Many individuals self-identified as first-time callers to UWGC's 2-1-1 from March to December 2020 because they lost their job due to the pandemic.

Moreover, 2-1-1 saves lives^{ix} and state funds.^x When people are connected to care at the onset of a crisis, they can recover quickly and become more self-sufficient. Neighboring states have invested annual state funds into 2-1-1 including Indiana^{xi} and Michigan^{xii} at \$1,000,000 annually, and Pennsylvania at \$750,000 annually.^{xiii} These states each serve approximately 400,000 callers annually.

The road to Ohio's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic requires healthy people, renewed communities, and a thriving economy. Ohio's recovery is dependent on community members getting access to health, behavioral health, and social services when they need them, so they quickly bounce back and become more self-sufficient. Without services such as 2-1-1 and connections to community-based organizations, full statewide recovery will be constrained.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony.

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ⁱ <https://www.development.ohio.gov/files/research/p7005.pdf>

ⁱⁱ https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/0a7bdcd9-b8d5-4193-a1af-e711be4ef541/2019_OhioDrugOverdoseReport_Final_11.06.20.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE.Z18_M1HGGIK0N0J000Q09DDDDM3000-0a7bdcd9-b8d5-4193-a1af-e711be4ef541-nmv3qSt

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://ohiolmi.com/portals/206/laus/archive/2020/colorratemap1120.pdf>

^{iv} https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23192/w23192.pdf

^v <https://www.dispatch.com/story/opinion/editorials/2020/10/29/editorial-addiction-epidemic-hasnt-gone-anywhere/6053054002/>

^{vi} <https://www.cleveland.com/news/2020/12/coping-through-covid-mental-health-officials-in-cuyahoga-county-worry-as-pandemic-heightens-attempted-suicides-offers-resources-to-the-community.html>

^{vii} <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

^{viii} <https://www.211oh.org/reports>

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

^x <https://nj211.org/cost-savings-211>; <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2020/04/06/coronavirus-milwaukee-calls-211-helpline-double-during-pandemic/5102379002/>

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

^{xii} <https://mi-psc.force.com/sfc/servlet.shepherd/version/download/068t000000wCCEAA2>

^{xiii} <http://lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/Resources/Documents/Reports/671.pdf>