

Human Services Committee
Public Hearing
February 20, 2025

In Support of S.B. 164: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Expanding Services Provided by the 2-1-1 Infoline Program Operated by the United Way of Connecticut

Dear Co-Chair Representative Gilchrest, Co-Chair Senator Lesser, Ranking Member Representative Case, Ranking Member Senator Harding, Vice Chair Representative Comey, Vice Chair Senator Maher and members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Isabel Almeida, President and CEO of United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut (UWCWC), and **I am testifying in support of S.B. 164.**

For nearly 50 years, 211 has been a vital public-private partnership with the State of Connecticut and United Way. When you call, a trained specialist listens and connects you to resources and benefits that match your needs. But 211 is more than a referral line—it provides compassionate and comprehensive guidance to navigate urgent, complex challenges. It is free, confidential, and available 24/7 in 180 languages, ensuring access for all.

Despite its critical role, demand for 211 has skyrocketed, while funding remains stagnant. Excluding COVID-related requests, website visits and call volume have increased by 300% since 2019. Despite the sharp increase in need, 211's core state funding has remained flat since 2009.

At United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut, our mission is to address critical needs and advance equitable pathways to well-being and financial security for everyone. We serve 27 towns across Fairfield and Southern Litchfield County, where 42% of households—more than 336,000 individuals—live at or below the **ALICE** (**A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed) threshold. These hardworking individuals and families face daily challenges in affording essentials like housing, food, transportation, child care, healthcare, and utilities. Many are just one crisis away from financial instability, yet they often do not qualify for public assistance programs such as SNAP or Medicaid.

That's where 211 steps in. It provides real-time, customized support, ensuring that families aren't left without options when facing financial distress. In 2024 alone, 211 responded to 1.8 million requests, with housing, mental health, and food assistance as the top needs.

In our region last year, 211 answered over 88,800 calls and web requests, connecting people to essential services. The database contains 40,000+ resources, many of which are state-funded, ensuring an efficient and coordinated social service system. And it works—94% of callers report being satisfied, and 75% say 211 helped them meet an urgent need.

IMPROVING LIVES IN

Greater Bridgeport

10 Middle Street, Suite 1101 Bridgeport, CT 06604
Tel: 203.334.5106 Fax: 203.334.3297

Northern Fairfield County

301 Main Street, Suite 2-5 Danbury, CT 06810
Tel: 203.792.5330 Fax: 203.967.9507

Southern Litchfield County

24 Bank Street, P.O. Box 29 New Milford, CT 06776
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Stamford and Greater Norwalk

1150 Summer Street Stamford, CT 06905
Tel: 203.348.7711 Fax: 203.967.9507



We have to act now to ensure 211 has the resources it needs to meet the increasing demand. To field and assist 1,700 more basic needs requests each week, we urge the legislature to allocate an additional \$2.25 million annually to 211's Information and Referral service line.

Investing in 211 is an investment in stronger, healthier, and more economically secure communities. With proper funding, 211 can continue to serve as the backbone of our state's safety net—coordinating nonprofits, government agencies, and other resources to maximize impact.

Families shouldn't have to wait for critical assistance. Please support S.B. 164 and the additional \$2.25M per year to ensure 211 remains strong, accessible, and effective—helping families meet their needs today while keeping our communities connected and thriving into the future.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Isabel Almeida".

Isabel Almeida
President and CEO
United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut

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