



March 25, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNOR'S FY27 DHS BUDGET AND
CONTINUED \$200,000 APPROPRIATION FOR UNITED WAY 211**

Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, I write in strong support of the Governor's FY27 Department of Human Services budget and the continued **\$200,000 appropriation to provide operational support to United Way's 211 system.**

United Way 211 is Rhode Island's **24/7/365**, multilingual, confidential human services helpline—an essential piece of the State's service delivery infrastructure. In 2025, Rhode Islanders connected with United Way's 211 and ADRC **nearly 100,000 times**, seeking assistance with housing, utilities, food, health coverage, and other basic needs. In addition to direct service, 211 supports the State by reducing non-emergency pressure on 911, preventing duplicative navigation across agencies, and providing a reliable entry point to accurate information and referrals.

This \$200,000 appropriation is consequential because it is tied to quantifiable performance and measurable public value. United Way has previously reported that state support at this level represents roughly **10% of 211's operating costs**, helping sustain the staffing and infrastructure required for high-volume, high-need statewide coverage. As a result of FY26 support, UWRI expanded call center capacity (including adding four part-time agents) and reduced call abandonment—which is when a caller hangs up because they have been waiting too long-- **from 15% to 3%**—better than the national standard of **5–8%**. That means that thousands more Rhode Islanders were able to reach help when they needed it.

United Way 211 is a key infrastructure partner to DHS, supporting benefit navigation, community education, and outreach so residents understand requirements and complete next steps to stay connected to essential supports. 211 also provides multilingual guidance and warm referrals—especially after hours—helping reduce preventable disruptions in coverage and benefits.

211 also functions as a rapid-response public information channel when Rhode Island's systems are under strain. United Way coordinates with the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency during widespread emergencies and helps residents access time-sensitive information and resources, including shelter locations, warming centers, and other emergency supports. This readiness is a core element of state resilience and continuity of services.



Continued investment is increasingly important given the level of economic strain facing Rhode Island households. United For ALICE reports that **39% of Rhode Island households** are below the ALICE Threshold (households in poverty plus ALICE households that earn above the federal poverty level but still cannot afford the basics). As costs rise, households experience higher levels of instability and are more likely to need navigation support for food, housing, health care, and benefit access—needs that are reflected in 211’s near real-time trends and community-level insights.

Finally, continued support is fiscally sound. United Way has reported an estimated **\$7.50 return on investment for every \$1 invested in 211**, driven by triage that minimizes unnecessary emergency response costs and more efficient access to preventive supports and benefits. In the context of constrained budgets and rising need, the appropriation represents a targeted, preventive investment that strengthens service access statewide.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges the Committee to support the Governor’s Proposed FY27 DHS budget and maintain the **\$200,000 appropriation** for United Way 211.

Sincerely,

Cortney Nicolato

President & CEO

United Way of Rhode Island