



May 14, 2026

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

RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill H7706 — Joint Resolution Making an Appropriation of \$500,000 to the United Way of Rhode Island for the 211 Human Services Hotline

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

As Co-Chairs of the United Way of Rhode Island Community Advisory Board, we write to express our strong support for House Bill H7706, which would increase the state appropriation for United Way 211 from \$200,000 to \$500,000. This investment would help sustain and strengthen Rhode Island's 24/7, multilingual, and confidential helpline that connects individuals and families to critical health and human services.

The Community Advisory Board is composed of community leaders who help inform, guide, and strengthen United Way of Rhode Island's work across the state. From that perspective, we understand how essential 211 is to Rhode Islanders seeking help with housing, food, utilities, healthcare, childcare, behavioral health, older adult services, disability supports, and other urgent needs.

In 2025 alone, 211 responded to nearly 100,000 calls, texts, emails, and in-person inquiries from Rhode Islanders in need. Behind every contact is a constituent navigating a challenge — whether it is a parent seeking safe shelter, a caregiver needing support, or a neighbor experiencing a crisis. In many cases, 211 is the first — and sometimes the only — trusted resource that people turn to in moments of urgency and uncertainty.

United Way 211 is also a national leader in call center navigation. According to United Way Worldwide's national 211 data report, United Way of Rhode Island handles the **7th most calls and contacts per capita** among 211 systems nationally. This demonstrates both the scale of need in Rhode Island and the strength of UWRI's continued innovation in ensuring Rhode Islanders remain connected to essential services.

We are proud that 211 operates as Rhode Island's front door to social services — relieving pressure on emergency services, supporting state agencies, and helping nonprofits deliver timely care. The increased state appropriation would support these services and help strengthen 211 as a key public infrastructure component of Rhode Island's service delivery system. With continued pressure on families and uncertainty surrounding critical safety net programs like SNAP, Medicaid, housing assistance, and behavioral health, this system will become even more vital in the months and years ahead.



211 investment is also fiscally responsible. Earlier 211 cost-savings research estimates that every \$1 invested in 211 returns approximately \$7.50 to the state, largely due to reduced reliance on emergency interventions and faster access to preventative support.

On behalf of the United Way of Rhode Island Community Advisory Board, we request that you support House Bill H7706 and an increased state investment in the 211 system. This investment continues to strengthen Rhode Island's service delivery infrastructure and helps ensure that individuals and families can access support when they need it most.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to strengthening Rhode Island's safety net.

Sincerely,

Jay Placencia

Co-Chair, Community Advisory Board
United Way of Rhode Island

Rena Sheehan

Co-Chair, Community Advisory Board
United Way of Rhode Island