



**United Way of New York State
&
2-1-1 New York State**

Testimony Presented by:

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Before the

Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing

Human Services

February 2, 2022

Thank you Senator Krueger, Assemblywoman Weinstein, Senator Persaud, Assemblywoman Rosenthal, Senator Brisport, and Assemblyman Hevesi and members of the Legislature for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of the SFY 23 budget.

My name is Hugh Parry and I am the President and Chief Executive Office of the United Way of New York State (UWNYS). I am here today representing our 35 local United Ways in communities across New York State and 2-1-1 New York State.

The core value of the United Way is to be a leader and advocate for community solutions. It is our mission to care for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in every community. We do this by mobilizing the power of donors, volunteers and community partners to give, volunteer and advocate for people in need. We also work to find solutions to complex community problems by working collaboratively to define issues, develop responses and generate resources to implement those responses. But we know that change doesn't happen in a vacuum. We need strong state partners and we are lucky to have great advocates in state government who are committed to listening and mobilizing change.

Since March of 2020, our network of local United Ways along with 2-1-1- have assisted local governments in responding to COVID, as well as, far too many natural disasters. In communities across the state, we helped sign people up for vaccinations, arranged for food delivery, partnered with legal aid and other not-for-profit organizations to provide rental assistance and provided assistance, when requested, with Excluded Workers and other state programs aimed at helping those in need. 2-1-1 New York State has coordinated with the NY Project Hope Emotional Support Helpline to ensure individuals taking support calls can focus on providing direct assistance and other matters (food, housing, healthcare, child care) can be referred to 2-1-1.

February also means it is tax season. We are providing Voluntary Income Tax Assistance (VITA) in communities across the state by recruiting volunteers, scheduling appointments, and providing supports to ensure New Yorkers who qualify can receive the assistance they need. This year, more than others, VITA services will be essential given COVID benefits and additional stimulus assistance so many families have received.

This year, United Way of New York State is focused on the ALICE Agenda – Asset, Limited, Income, Constrained, Employed – those individuals and families that are working but struggle to meet their basic household needs.

The latest ALICE report confirms that ALICE households and those in poverty fared significantly worse — financially, physically, and emotionally — during the pandemic. Nearly 60% of ALICE and poverty households experienced a loss of income due to the pandemic, compared to 40% of households that afforded the basics before COVID-19 hit. Even with the added protective measures of eviction moratoria and housing and food assistance programs, conditions worsened for households below the ALICE Threshold from March 2020 to May 2021.

Policy Recommendation

2-1-1 recommends that New York State not only invest in 2-1-1 but utilize the system to improve and enhance service delivery. 2-1-1 together with local United Ways across the state are trusted and valued. The systems are able to leverage community based organizations while easily connecting individuals to services and programs that can assist. 2-1-1 has the largest health and human service database and New York State should be leveraging the system rather than recreating databases or systems that are not unified or connected.

Budget Recommendation

United Way of NYS recommends that New York State **include \$3 million in state funding** for the 2022/23 state fiscal year:

- \$2,000,000 to maintain the current level of services
- \$500,000 to support activation in areas experiencing a disaster and inclusion in NYS' emergency plan
- \$500,000 for the development of a statewide resource data base of services and centralized website to facilitate resource searches

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New York State has a very large network of public and nonprofit agencies that are able to provide critical programs and services at the state and local level to constituents. However, accessing these services, and finding the right service, can often be very difficult for consumer especially in a time of disaster. That is why 2-1-1 was created over a decade ago.

2-1-1 is a single, easy-to-remember phone number that connects and refers New Yorkers to the health and human services they need 24/7 365 days of the year, in all 62 counties across NYS. 2-1-1 leads to multiple call centers located throughout the state that are staffed with operators who answer the call and provide the information requested based on a large database that contains detailed information on the services available.

Over the last few years, 2-1-1 has grown and become a critical asset to communities and individuals providing assistance navigating our complex system of services across New York State, as well as a critical resource in time of natural disasters, and most recently, public health emergencies.

In the first 6 months of 2021, 2-1-1 provided 2.3 million referrals, providing language translation assistance to 3,600 of those. Half, or 1.2 million of those referrals were COVID-related. This is a 153% increase from the first six months of 2019 (pre-pandemic). Seventy percent of COVID-related calls through the first 6 months of 2021 were for food and meals. Other major caller needs

include legal/consumer and public safety services, income support & assistance (which includes VITA and free tax preparation assistance), housing and healthcare.

A History of Legislative Support

2-1-1 received its first legislative appropriation in the 2006/07 budget and the legislature has continued to support (with the exception of 2009/10 and 2010/11). Last year the Legislature supported increased funding in the amount of \$2 million to help the network continue to respond to COVID.

A Public-Private Partnership

Annual funding for 2-1-1 statewide is over \$7 million. \$2 million provided in SFY 21-22 from the Legislature was matched by \$5.3 million in local grants, contracts, and fee for service agreements. \$1.3 million of the match comes directly from local United Way investments. Local contracts and fee for services arrangements include: answering off hour calls for local departments of aging, health, and/or social services; acting as CODE Blue resources to help homeless individuals find shelter; assisting local social services departments with foster care screening and recruitment; supporting local emergency response efforts during a natural disaster or weather related event; and more recently assisting with vaccine appointments and eviction assistance.

Around the State, Around the Clock With No Days Off

2-1-1 is built on an infrastructure of pre-existing information and referral services and deep United Way relationships in communities. The first 2-1-1 call was answered in Rochester in December of 2004. It was not until 2015 that 2-1-1, with the help of the Legislature, was expanded into the final 6 counties (Northern New York and the Mohawk Valley). In November 2017, 2-1-1 achieved the goal of providing services 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When all other specialized, non-emergency help lines close for the day, or for the week, 2-1-1 is still available to answer the call.

Enhanced Technology to Better Serve New Yorkers

Within the additional funding provided by the Legislature last year, 2-1-1 is able to provide texting services across the state. It is anticipated texting will be available statewide this summer. There is a growing demand for texting capacity. Younger individuals are more likely to seek assistance through text. Texting also allows the call centers to push out information to those who sign up to receive alerts and specialized messages (early childhood development, food drives, vaccine appointments, substance abuse support, etc). Texting has also created efficiencies within the call centers that allow operators to focus on those calling 2-1-1 for assistance.

This year, 2-1-1 is requesting an additional **\$500,000** to support the creation of a statewide database. Currently each of the call centers manage their own database and while the call centers are able to share and access information, the general public cannot. Time and time again, United Way and 2-1-1 are hearing from individuals and community partners that an enhanced, easily searchable website and database would be beneficial.

The 2-1-1 database is the largest health and human service database in the state. There are over 15,300 agencies and organizations, 43,400 programs and 74,000 services. The databases are organized according to the AIRS (Alliance of Information and Referral Systems) problems and needs categories and includes resource listings for services that range from childcare to food pantries; shelters to specialized services; and from mental health to transportation – as just a few examples.

We believe a statewide database will help health care providers, schools, state, local and community partners access local relevant information that is not currently available. Right now someone looking for information would have to know to go to 2-1-1 and then pick the regional call center before being able to conduct a search.

Disaster and Emergency Assistance

Each 2-1-1 is required to have an up-to-date plan for responding to disasters and emergencies. Many of them have formal agreements with the County Office of Emergency Management to offer mutual support to a disaster or emergency. Local governments rely on the 2-1-1 system to alleviate strain on 911 and/or provide non-emergency assistance. Further, there are many instances where 2-1-1 was able to track requests and help coordinate response efforts or determine unmet needs that helped leverage additional resources or assistance.

Other states have included 2-1-1 in their State Emergency Response Plan and 2-1-1 is able to seek reimbursement or support to help offset additional costs directly tied to being activated to respond to a disaster or emergency. With the exception of Superstorm Sandy, when the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services activated the 2-1-1 network, 2-1-1 has not received direct support from the state.

This year, 2-1-1 is requesting **\$500,000** in additional support to help offset costs related to responding or being activated. In recent years, flooding, snow storms, and other events have created strain on the system. The funds would only be used if 2-1-1 is activated and would financially help the call centers who continued to receive a historic number of calls related to COVID-19.

*2-1-1 Requests Categories - Statewide and By 2-1-1 Call Center
January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021*

To better help provide context for why an individual would call 2-1-1 or seek assistance, below is a breakdown of requests made from January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021. The data is provided on a statewide basis as well as by call center.

Category	Statewide	ADK	Central	Helpline	Hudson Valley	Life Line	LI	Mid-York	North East	Susquehanna	Tompkins Cortland	WNY
Housing and Shelter	21.6%	19.9%	39.1%	11.0%	14.6%	23.3%	21.8%	11.2%	9.9%	12.2%	14.6%	38.7%
Healthcare & COVID-19	15.9%	12.0%	10.3%	43.6%	6.0%	5.6%	11.7%	8.6%	14.6%	28.8%	33.6%	13.6%
Other*	15.4%	40.1%	13.3%	14.7%	13.2%	21.2%	20.9%	36.1%	14.5%	12.1%	23.8%	4.0%
Employment & Income	11.9%	5.6%	4.9%	4.8%	26.0%	2.0%	6.9%	27.4%	46.8%	19.5%	12.9%	1.4%
Food	9.9%	2.8%	6.7%	15.3%	3.3%	13.1%	5.9%	5.4%	2.9%	14.8%	3.4%	4.9%
Government & Legal	9.6%	9.1%	9.6%	4.3%	30.9%	4.9%	16.1%	2.8%	5.8%	2.1%	3.2%	13.7%
Disaster	4.8%	Less than 1%	Less than 1%	1.0%	Less than 1%	13.3%	Less than 1%	Less than 1%	Less than 1%	5.6%	Less than 1%	Less than 1%
Mental Health & Addictions	4.4%	3.0%	6.4%	Less than 1%	2.3%	10.6%	2.9%	3.2%	1.4%	Less than 1%	1.0%	2.0%
Utilities	2.9%	2.9%	2.2%	Less than 1%	1.5%	3.4%	9.7%	1.0%	1.9%	1.5%	1.4%	5.1%
Clothing & Household	1.8%	Less than 1%	3.8%	Less than 1%	Less than 1%	1.8%	1.4%	2.0%	1.0%	1.8%	Less than 1%	3.6%
Transportation Assistance	1.4%	2.2%	2.0%	2.8%	Less than 1%	Less than 1%	1.6%	1.0%	Less than 1%	Less than 1%	4.7%	2.0%

**Includes agency and other contact information, community development & enrichment, volunteering and donation, special population services, and special populations.*

Using ALICE Measures as a Guide to Recovery

Policy Recommendation

United Way of NYS recommends that New York State support, and utilize ALICE data to inform recovery efforts, especially as important policy decisions are being discussed at the state level. Moreover, New York State should partner with local United Ways and 211 when implementing statewide recovery programs to help with housing, food, rent, heat, and other benefits. The combined efforts of utilizing community based organizations in tandem with 211 can create efficiencies and help New Yorkers access and enroll in benefits they qualify for. Together we can help ALICE families.

Budget Recommendation

For many households, overall household finances were constricted during the pandemic, and it became more difficult to meet basic needs. There were a variety of reasons for this: reduced income or other employment impacts, school closures, gaps in access to health care, new or worsening health problems, decreased social support during quarantine, and other issues. While all households were undoubtedly affected in some way, it is not surprising that those who were already struggling to make ends meet before the pandemic fared worse.

For these reasons we support the following programs that support basic needs and promote opportunity:

Housing/Utilities

- Expanding the Emergency Rental Assistance Program which provides significant economic relief to help low and moderate-income households at risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability
- Continuing to support the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)

Food Assistance

- Maintaining flexibilities provided throughout the pandemic for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Providing additional funding for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) which allows Emergency Food Relief Organizations (EFRO) in New York State to serve those in need

Income Assistance

- Making the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) more equitable and inclusive by:
Including young childless workers age 18–24, Increasing the income limits and phase-

out rate to reflect our state minimum wage, Allowing quarterly payments rather than yearly, and Including residents who file with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITIN)

Children & Families

- Expanding options and access to affordable and high quality child care so that children’s safety and well-being are accounted for while parents attend work or other duties.

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United Way of New York State doubled down on our commitment to drive change and ensure the financial security of individuals and families by investing in the ALICE Project. ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed. In other words, hardworking individuals who are above the federal poverty level but do not make enough to cover the basics of housing, food, health care, child care, transportation and technology.

The latest report confirms what we all suspected, that ALICE households and those in poverty were most impacted by the pandemic, especially those living in our urban areas. It reveals that when analyzed through an ALICE lens, nearly 60% of ALICE and poverty households experienced a loss of income due to the pandemic, compared to 40% of households that afforded the basics before COVID-19 hit. Even with government supports in place, households below the ALICE threshold reported higher levels of job loss, child care struggles and health challenges than those earning an income that affords the basics. In addition, racial inequities are evident within the data, as Black and Hispanic households reported harsher experiences at every turn. And there are disparities along gender lines as well as households led by single mothers were disproportionately impacted.

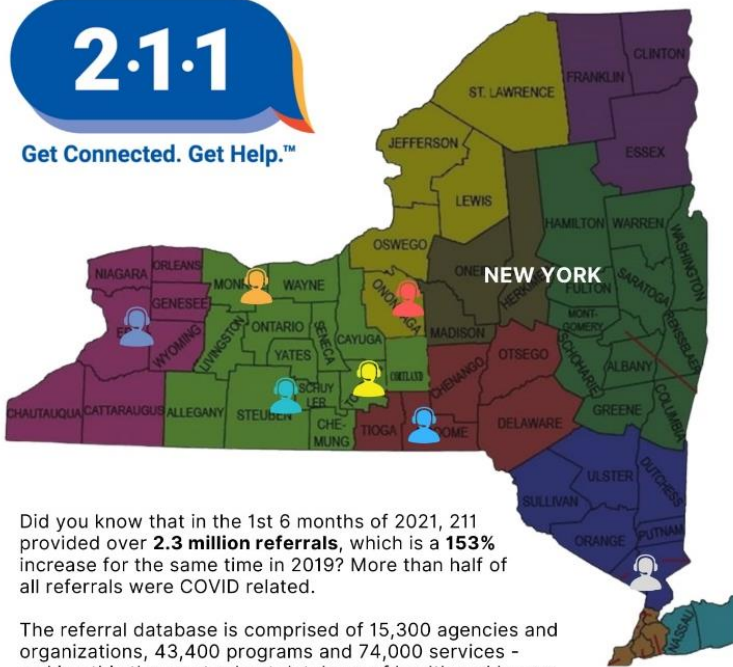
ALICE data aims to shed light on the experiences of ALICE households, fill gaps left by traditional economic measures, and help policymakers and community stakeholders make data-informed decisions to address the root causes of financial hardship.

By more accurately identifying need, the ALICE measures can better guide policies and practices to assist individuals and families weather the current crisis. COVID-19 shows how exposed ALICE households — and therefore all our communities and businesses — are to an emergency. For example, from ALICE data we know that:

- ALICE workers are more vulnerable. The pandemic has created two groups of ALICE workers: those who are essential and still working, typically on-site; and those who are non-essential, who are now working far fewer hours or not at all.
- Black ALICE households are at greater risk. Black people are contracting COVID-19 at higher rates and dying at higher rates than their White counterparts.
- ALICE families with children face additional hardships. Almost one in four families with children in the U.S. have income below the ALICE Threshold. They are especially vulnerable to the disruptions that accompany child care, school, and university closures.

- ALICE seniors face greater risks. People over the age of 60 are the age group most susceptible to serious illness from COVID-19. Half of seniors in the U.S. have income below the ALICE Threshold; they have no extra income and little or no savings to cover extra health care costs.

For more information on ALICE or to obtain ALICE data by County or Legislative District, please visit <https://uwnys.org/alice/>



Did you know that in the 1st 6 months of 2021, 211 provided over **2.3 million referrals**, which is a **153%** increase for the same time in 2019? More than half of all referrals were COVID related.

The referral database is comprised of 15,300 agencies and organizations, 43,400 programs and 74,000 services - making this the most robust database of health and human services in New York State.

2-1-1 New York Service Regions

- Adirondack
- Northeast
- Mid-York
- Susquehanna River
- Hudson Valley
- New York City
- Long Island
- Finger Lakes
- Western NY
- Central NY

2-1-1 New York Contact Centers

- 211 Central New York**
 - Contact Community Services**
38 Employees
- 211 Finger Lakes**
 - 211 LifeLine**
67 Employees
 - 211 HelpLine**
5 Employees
 - 211 Tompkins/Cortland**
7 Employees
- 211 Hudson Valley**
 - 18 Employees
- 211 Susquehanna River Region**
 - 6 Employees
- 211 Western New York**
 - 31 Employees

172 Total
211 Contact Center Employees