



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY THERESE DALY,
PRESIDENT & CEO OF THE UNITED WAY OF NEW YORK STATE
AND 211 NEW YORK, INC**

TO THE

**ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS AND SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEES
JOINT LEGLISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING On
HUMAN SERVICES SFY 2026-27**

FEBRUARY 4, 2026

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit written testimony to elevate essential priorities for United Way of New York State. My name is Therese Daly, and I am the proud President & CEO of United Way of New York State (UWNYS) and 211 New York Inc. (211 NY).

The core mission of the United Way & 211 New York Inc. is to be a leader and advocate for community solutions.

Every day, the 31 local United Ways work with local communities to help find solutions to complex problems. They collaborate with community partners to define issues that impact the health, education and financial stability of individuals and families across New York. Through this collaboration, the United Way network develops responses and generates resources by mobilizing the power of donors, volunteers, and community partners to give, volunteer and advocate for people in need.

Annually the network invests more than \$160 million in communities statewide - a staggering statistic that speaks volumes to our capabilities and value!

In my first year as President & CEO of UWNYS, we worked tirelessly to support New Yorkers.

In 2025, 211 New York Inc. received more than 2.1 million calls statewide and collaborated with state agencies, including OCFS, OTDA, OMH, ESDC, and the Executive Chamber on initiatives that helped spread awareness of 211 NY and provide help to those in critical need.

We were pleased that ESDC contracted with 211 NY to help expand access to high speed and reliable internet services through the ConnectALL program. Under the contract, 211 NY provides comprehensive information, screening, referral services, and enrollment assistance to all eligible New York State community members in the nine economic development regions outside of New York City. We look forward to working with ESDC and all of you to help spread the word about this incredible opportunity to connect eligible New Yorkers to low-cost internet. We are finding so many individuals and families do not realize they can save on internet and qualify for reliable broadband for as little as \$20 per month if their household qualifies or participates in:

- SNAP
- Medicaid
- HEAP
- NYC and some municipalities in Nassau & Westchester Counties
 - Senior Citizen rent increase exemption
 - Disability rent increase exemption

Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites, many of which partner with 211 NY for eligibility screening and appointment setting.

OMH has contracted with 211NY to connect formerly incarcerated individuals to services in their community to reduce the chances of substance abuse relapse, psychiatric decomposition, or return to the criminal justice system. Individuals can call 211 or visit the 211 website (<https://www.211newyork.org/reentry-resource-directory>) that has community services (mental health, social services, housing, benefits, crisis services) listed by county.

We continue to work with DHSES and OMH under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Grant to promote emergency preparedness and to help New Yorkers plan and respond. We have developed a tool kit that is on the 211 website (<https://www.211newyork.org/emergency-preparedness>) that has important information on how to create a plan, assemble a kit and to connect to services through 211 or receive alerts from NYS, County Emergency Management or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. We continue to be grateful to the legislature for including 211 NY in the State Disaster Preparedness Commission in 2022. This has helped connect to local county emergency management and the various state agencies.

In May, UWNYS released an updated report on ALICE (Asset, Limited, Income, Constrained Employed), entitled ALICE in the Crosscurrents: An Update on Financial Hardship in New York[1]. If you are not familiar with ALICE, ALICE is in every community, and unfortunately, the number of ALICE households in New York has reached a new high and exceeds the national average. Here are just a few statewide statistics:

- The share of ALICE households in New York has grown from 43% in 2019 to 48% based on the most recent data released in 2024, reflecting continued financial strain despite economic recovery efforts. This is nearly half of New York State.
- In 2024, the basic cost for a family of four (with an infant and a preschooler) to live in New York is approximately \$102,000 annually, well beyond what many working families earn.
- Households headed by adults age 65 and older remain the fastest-growing ALICE population, with approximately 1.2 million older New Yorkers—about 56%—living below the ALICE threshold.
- Nearly 7 in 10 New Yorkers under the age of 25 (69%) continue to struggle to meet basic needs, highlighting persistent challenges for young people entering adulthood.
- Regionally, ALICE households make up approximately 55% of New York City residents, 32% of households in the surrounding suburban counties, and 41% in the rest of the state, underscoring that financial hardship is widespread across urban, suburban, and rural communities.

While New York has made significant investments in social and economic policies, we are still falling short for our young people, working families, and older adults alike.

UWNYS public policy agenda, based on prioritizing local needs, supports ALICE, and aligns with our goal to develop responses and to generate local resources that help create financial stability. This year, the network identified the following priorities:

- Affordable and safe housing
- Access to high-quality and affordable childcare
- Early childhood development
- Food insecurity (including SNAP and free school meals)
- Workforce development (job training, higher wages, and transportation access)
- Financial assistance with rent and utilities
- Behavioral, mental health, and substance abuse.

To continue to support our impact on local communities, UWNYS is once again seeking your support for essential priorities to be included the 2026-2027 Enacted State Budget. Your support will help United Way maintain, sustain, and build on these effective initiatives.

211 New York Inc.

- **211 New York is requesting the Legislature include \$2.8 million in the Enacted State Budget to maintain access to 211 NY. This is level funding from the Enacted SFY 25-26 budget.**
- **211 New York is also requesting enacting A.7381 (Lupardo)/S.6931 (Harckham), which establishes the 2-1-1 Essential Community Services Hotline System, providing the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) with oversight authority, specifying the information and referral services that must be provided by trained community resource specialists, and establishes annual reporting requirements for OCFS based on data provided by 211 NY.**

First, let me say thank you for your continued support and funding of 211 New York. We were disappointed, once again this year, when 211 was not included in the Executive budget. We have worked hard with the Executive Chamber and state agencies to integrate 211 into state operations to better assist New Yorkers. 211 has become an essential service and should be treated funded as one. As such we hope you will support our budget request and the passage of legislation to establish 211 as the Essential Community Service Hotline.

For those new to legislature or unaware of 211 New York, 211 is a statewide free and confidential health and human services referral helpline that is operated by 211 New York, which is affiliated with United Way of New York State.

The Federal Trade Commission (FCC) officially designated 211 as the three-digit dialing code for health and human services information and referral throughout the United States in 2000. Subsequently, New York's Public Service Commission (PSC) assigned the number to 211 New York to develop the service statewide. The first regional 211 service in New York was available in December 2004 and served the Finger Lakes region, with statewide 24/7 coverage achieved in January 2015.

211 is accessible 24 hours a day/365 day a year in over 180 languages, enabling residents to relate to a trained operator who evaluates the callers' needs, accesses a database that contains information on programs and organizations across NYS, and refers them to the best possible solution. Statewide texting is also now an option. New Yorkers can now text their zip code to 898-211 with questions or to get connected to services.

211 provides information on the work of both public agencies and private organizations in the fields of social services, public health, law enforcement, homeland security and emergency services, legal assistance, corrections, temporary and disability services, and more. New Yorkers are using 211 every day. In 2025, there were over 2.1 million phone calls made to 211-statewide.

But 211 is more than a telephone number. Over its 20+ year history, the 211 system has created both local and statewide partnerships, leveraging the system to ensure that New Yorkers have access to the information and referrals they need when they need them most. For example:

211 Contributes to Disaster Planning, Relief and Recovery Efforts. During several of the most impactful storms in recent history, including but not limited to natural disasters statewide, ranging from storms of horrific impact to more localized events. In 2025, 211 was able to rapidly mobilize to connect those impacted by the tornadoes and severe storms to relief and recovery efforts in Mohawk Valley and other parts of Central New York. Just recently, 211 provided services in a critical time during the powerful snowstorm that affected the entire state of New York in late January of this year (2026). In fact, in both instances, DHSES promoted 211 and encouraged individuals to call 211 for non-emergency services to help alleviate call volume to 911.

211 provided access to reliable, up-to-date, relevant information for those impacted, first responders, and long-term recovery groups. In many counties, 211 is recognized

as a member of disaster operations for training, exercises, and response. FEMA promotes 211 as the number to call for information and referral.

- **Flooding in Steuben and Allegany Counties** – 211 Community Resource Specialists offered more than 150 referrals to shelter, food, disaster care management, NYS DHSES Damage Self-Reporting tool, and the Emergency Assistance HCR NYS Homeowner Storm Repair Grant. 211 received recognition from the FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaison for their work connecting flood survivors to resources available through the Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD), county and state agencies.
- **211 Helps our Fiscally Strapped Counties.** Local Departments of Social Services use 211 for connection to local resources that supplement benefits provided by the county. In Erie, Onondaga, and Oswego Counties, 211 is the first point of contact for afterhours emergency housing services. Further, counties across the state rely on 211 to communicate Code Blue services which provide a warm place to stay when outdoor temperatures are below 32 degrees.

**2-1-1 New York, Inc. Requests
\$2.8M in the SFY 26-27 Final Budget for 2-1-1**

2025 NY Top Needs by Region

211	GET CONNECTED. GET HELP.	WNY	Finger Lakes	Southern Tier	Tompkins Cortland	Susquehanna	CNY	Mid-York	ADK	Capital Region	Hudson Valley	NYC	Long Island
Housing	Housing	Food & Meals	Income Support & Assistance	Food & Meals	Housing	Housing	Information Services	Housing	Income Support & Assistance	Legal, Consumer, Public Safety	Housing		
Income Support & Assistance	Mental Health & Addictions	Housing	Housing	Income Support & Assistance	Food & Meals	Legal, Consumer, Public Safety	Housing	Information Services	Gov't & Economic Services	Food & Meals	Information Services		
Food & Meals	Information Service	Information Services	Transportation	Individual Family Community	Clothing, Personal, Household Needs	Individual Family Community	Income Support & Assistance	Legal, Consumer, Public Safety	Housing	Gov't & Economic Services	Income Support & Assistance		
Transportation	Legal, Consumer Public Safety	Health Care	Information Services	Housing	Disaster Services	Food & Meals	Utility Assistance	Utility Assistance	Information Services	Individual, Family, Community	Legal, Consumer, Public Safety		
Utility Assistance	Food & Meals	Transportation	Food & Meals	Clothing, Personal, Household Needs	Individual Family Community	Utility Assistance	Food & Meals	Income Support & Assistance	Food & Meals	Housing	Utility Assistance		

Get Connected. Get Help.™

GET CONNECTED.

GET HELP.

211

211 New York Regions

211 WNY – 211wny.org

Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, Wyoming

211/Life Line – 211lifeline.org

Cayuga, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne

211 Helpline – 211helpline.org

Allegany, Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Yates

211 Tompkins/Cortland – 211tompkins.org

Cortland, Tompkins

211 CNY – 211cny.org

Jefferson, Lewis, Onondaga, Oswego, St. Lawrence

211 Susquehanna River Region – helpme211.org

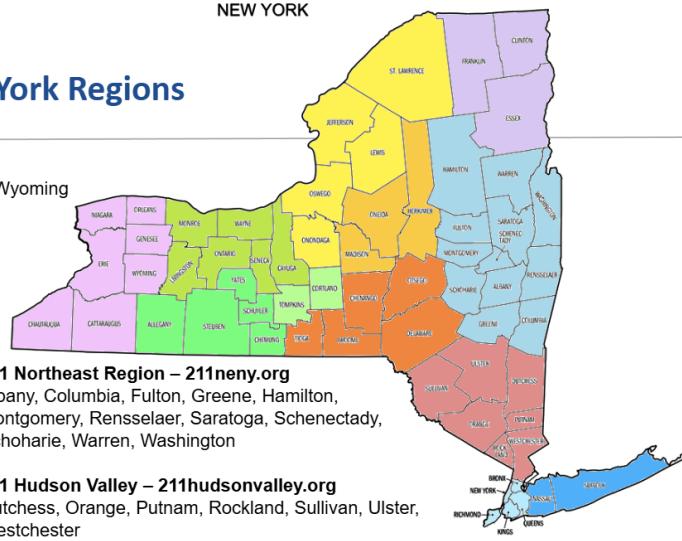
Broome, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego, Tioga

211 Mid-York – 211midyork.org

Herkimer, Madison, Oneida

211 ADK – 211adk.org

Counties Served: Clinton, Essex, Franklin



211 Northeast Region – 211neny.org

Albany, Columbia, Fulton, Greene, Hamilton, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Warren, Washington

211 Hudson Valley – 211hudsonvalley.org

Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster, Westchester

211 NYC – nyc.gov/311

Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, Richmond

211 Long Island – 211li.org

Nassau, Suffolk

Our ALICE data and call trends show a clear and growing level of serious need. The most common requests are for food assistance, income support, housing stability, and utility help. Community Resource Specialists report that many callers are in crisis, requiring time-intensive support and multiple referrals. Increasingly, callers are seeking help for the first time, and cases are becoming more complex. At the same time, the 211 system is responding to weather-related emergencies and other crises without any reimbursement for overtime, call surges, or system enhancements made to meet this demand.

Funding for 211 New York Inc is a critical resource for ALL New Yorkers.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

United Way of New York is requesting that the Legislature invest \$7 million in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library Program in the 2026- 2027 Enacted State Budget.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program is a no cost book gifting program, providing high-quality books each month to children from birth to age five, no matter their family's income. After launching in 1995, the program grew quickly, initially only distributing books to children living in Sevier County, Tennessee where Dolly grew up. However, the program was such a success that in 2000 efforts to replicate the program began nationally.

The Imagination Library partners with local affiliates who help bring the program to cities, towns, and communities. Local affiliates are responsible for enrolling children who live in their

geographical areas. They also promote local programs and host events. Books are 100% free for children because local affiliates must secure funds to cover the cost of books and shipping fees.

Here in New York, there are currently eighty-eight local affiliates, which include local libraries, local United Ways, school districts and community partners. Out of our 31United Ways, we have several of them participating in the program, including Buffalo, New York City, Westchester and Putnam, the Capital Region, and Southern Tier, that cover most of the state's large, urban cities.

We will once again this year be celebrating Dolly Day on February ___, 2026 and hope you will join us to advocate for funding but to also celebrate Dolly Parton's 80th Birthday!

Working Families Tax Credit:

United Way of New York State is requesting the Legislature include the Working Families Tax Credit (S.2082/A.3474) in the Enacted State Budget.

Using the ALICE data and looking at the various challenges, New Yorkers are experiencing, it is critical to understand how to make day to-day life easier, not harder.

Tax credits allow money to stay in New Yorkers' pockets and allow for understanding and reassurance.

It is critical for New York to utilize a multi-pronged approach to help achieve financial security, and expanding the working families tax credit, as proposed in S.2082 (Goundares)/A.3474 (Hevesi), would have a positive impact on the families who need it the most. Our goal is to help individuals and families achieve and maintain independence. Expanding and strengthening tax credits is one important means of building financial stability and economic mobility.

Income Disregard Legislation:

United Way of New York State is requesting the Legislature include an increase to the federal poverty level requirement for recipients where it concerns the one-time disregard of earned income (S.182A.4317) in the Enacted State Budget.

The FY 2023-24 Enacted State Budget included a one-time income disregard for individuals whose income doesn't exceed the 200% federal poverty level (FPL) and completed an approved employment program can retain full public assistance benefits for six months for purposes of mitigating a "benefits cliff." While we are in support of the Income Disregard, we are concerned that the language limits the number of people participating due to the 200% FPL cap. Therefore, we are asking that the 2026-2027 Enacted Budget please remove the following language that states a recipient's total income shall not be more than 200% of the federal poverty level or increase the FPL to 400%.

Food Insecurity

United Way of New York State is requesting the Legislature include the Hunger Free Campus Act (S.2637/A.1724) in the Enacted State Budget.

A recent report identified 39% of college students face food insecurity. The high cost of college tuition can make the ability to afford adequate meals difficult. Many students are faced with the difficult decision of whether they should pay their tuition, buy textbooks, pay rent, or purchase food, a tough decision that college students should not have to make.

Here at UWNYS, we believe that no student can learn successfully if they do not have food and housing. Therefore, we strongly encourage the passage of the “hunger free campus act.”. This legislation aims to address that concern by creating a hunger task force, designating a staff member as a SNAP point person, making SNAP more readily accessible on campus, creating campus food pantries, creating a student meal credit sharing program, as well as creating an annual student survey on hunger on campus.

California, New Jersey, and Minnesota have already passed similar legislation. New York State is deeply rooted in academia and higher education, and so should our support of students in New York State. UWNYS, in collaboration with 211 sees alignment with this priority and the possibility of participation of helping mitigate campus hunger.

Pass and enact the Hunger Free Campus Act S.2637 (May)/A.1724 (Rosenthal) this year to shine a light on food insecurity on our campuses.

Closing:

We are incredibly grateful to the Legislature for your constant support for all United Way and 211’s initiatives. Together we work to help New Yorkers thrive.

We are thrilled with the recent childcare initiatives, healthy school meals, and the implementation of tax credits.

Thank you to the Legislature for your time, energy, and efforts for all of us and New York State.

Sincerely,



Therese Daly

United Way of New York State & 211 NY

[1] <https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/new-york>