

5/14/2024

Honorable Representative Marvin Abney,  
Chair House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence Rhode Island, 02908

Re: Testimony in Support of House Resolution No. 7693

Dear Chairman Abney and esteemed members of the Rhode Island House Finance Committee,

As a member of United Way of Rhode Island, I am writing to express my strong support for House Resolution No. 7693 and to emphasize the critical importance of the 211 helpline and our Seniors and Disability Services programs to the well-being of Rhode Islanders.

United Way of Rhode Island, under the leadership of our President and CEO, has been a beacon of support and assistance for our community through its comprehensive helpline, 211. Since its inception in 2007, the 211 helpline has served as a lifeline for Rhode Islanders in times of crisis, offering essential resources and assistance to individuals and families in need.

During the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 211 helpline proved to be an invaluable asset, with call volumes skyrocketing to a record high of 263,347 in 2021. This surge in calls underscores the indispensable role that 211 plays in connecting Rhode Islanders with vital services and resources, particularly during times of crisis.

As a Team Member of United Way of Rhode Island I have bore witness to this first hand. There have been occasions in my career at United Way of Rhode Island, where I have covered the front desk reception, taking phone calls and directing them to their final destination, which so very often is 211 or Senior Disability Services. One day in the late Spring of 2023, I answered the phone to find a woman, crying and distraught on the other end of the line. She had just left her home on foot with her child after having been physically assaulted by her partner. I immediately connected 211 to the call, but remained on the line speaking to her while the 211 team member worked feverishly behind the scenes to connect her to a myriad of immediate support. The authorities had been called, but 211 was able to arrange for transportation to a shelter, a shelter bed for this woman and her daughter, as well as next day appointments with case management. I remember I was in tears that afternoon, and in awe of how quickly and empathetically the 211 team acted. It is in moments of extreme need, anguish, and sometimes terror that our fellow Rhode Islanders call us, and 211 is always there to answer, listen and take action.

In conclusion, I urge you to support House Resolution No. 7693 and to invest in the vital work of United Way of Rhode Island. By doing so, we can ensure that our community continues to receive the support and assistance it needs to thrive.

Thank you for considering our testimony and for your ongoing support of United Way of Rhode Island's mission to address the needs of our community.

Sincerely,

**Millicent Budlong-Springer**  
**Director of Executive Office,**  
**United Way of Rhode Island**