

April 12, 2000

Alan R. Schriber, Chair
Public Utilities Commission of Ohio
180 East Broad Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215-3793

Re: Case No. 93-1799-TP-COI

Dear Dr. Schriber:

The Board of Directors of CONTACT Community Connection is writing to ask the PUCO to designate "211" as the three-digit access number for non-emergency community services referrals throughout Ohio.

Thousands of Ohioans face homelessness, hunger, job dislocation, substance abuse or other community service needs every day and often do not know where to turn. Navigating the maze of community services can be a daunting task. A simple, reliable universally recognizable access number could make all the difference for a person in need. Ohio Information & Referral organizations already respond to over a half a million calls per year from Ohioans in crisis or struggling with ongoing problems and needing referrals to resources in their community. Many of these organizations spend thousands of dollars every year offering and promoting a variety of 800 numbers, making the search for help even more overwhelming.

Designating 211 as a universal access number for community service referrals would end the frustration and confusion and ensure that Ohioans get the help they need as soon as possible. The 211 number could also help to reduce the number of inappropriate 911 calls and with increased public awareness, the number itself could become an outreach tool that would help community service agencies to reach more families in need.

As you know, proponents of 211 are also pursuing the issue at the national level. Atlanta and Connecticut have already successfully implemented 211 and have seen calls increase nearly 40%. The movement to make 211 the universal number for access to community services is growing in many other states.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts on this important issue.

Sincerely,



James Hill
President, Board of Directors

Linking Human Needs with Sources of Help in the Community

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CONTACT Community Connection is funded by the Department of Human Services, Trumbull County Board of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health, United Way of Trumbull County, Religious Organizations, Foundations, Individuals and Grants.

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