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First Call For Help, Inc.

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P031

March 27, 2000

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

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

Dear Mr. Schriber,

We are writing in support of the petition filed by the 211 Ohio Collaborative, asking 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. Because navigating the maze of community services can be a daunting task, a simple, reliable, universally recognizable 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.

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. 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 need.

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

Designating 211 as a statewide community services referral number makes sense. We encourage the PUCO to carefully consider this petition as an important opportunity to make it easier for our most vulnerable citizens to find the help they need. We appreciate this opportunity to share our thoughts on this important issue. Thank you for your consideration of the 211 Ohio Collaborative's petition

Sincerely,

Kendall P. Alexander, LISW
Executive Director



A United Way Agency



A contract
agency of the
Four County
ADAMHS Board