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Title: **Health and Human Services Referral System - Modifications**

Testimony of Quinton Askew, President/CEO 211 Maryland

Before the Finance Committee, Annapolis, Maryland

February 27, 2020

Good afternoon, Chairman Kelley, Vice Chairman Feldman and members of this committee, my name is Quinton Askew, President/CEO of 211 Maryland. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on **behalf of Senate Bill 584, Health and Human Services Referral System – Modifications and brief you on the innovative system called 2-1-1.**

This bill allows 2-1-1 Maryland to begin the next chapter of providing health and human services for Maryland residents by, eliminating the statutory cap on the number of call centers in the network, transitions the oversight functions to our 2-1-1 Maryland board in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health and most importantly, **an amendment requiring the Department to provide a cost analysis to understand the true cost of a statewide service.**

For those who may not be familiar with 2-1-1, 2-1-1 is Maryland's simple, easy to remember number for health and human services. 2-1-1 Maryland is the only health and human service system that is positioned with a statewide database to effectively and efficiently support those in need 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year and in more than 150 languages.

Last Fiscal Year, we responded to over 380,000 Marylanders for help and another 123, 000 used our online database. Every year we experience an increase in call volume.

Despite our many success stories, 2-1-1 is at a critical juncture. We cannot sustain the level of increases in statewide calls which has been over 39% the previous two years, coupled with flat funding from the state. The system continues to be stretched beyond its capacity. Each of the four call centers who make up the 2-1-1 system, uses a large percentage of their own budget to support answering 2-1-1 calls.

We need your support and partnership to make 2-1-1 a sustainable reality. We ask, your support with the bills amended request for a cost analysis. This is the only way to have a true understanding of the financial need to operate a 24-hour, 365 day a year statewide health & human service system, including crisis calls for mental health and substance use. We strongly believe additional investments will position 2-1-1 Maryland to fully achieve its vision, "to build a strong, coordinated system that supports our state and local government to address critical needs in the community".

Each 2-1-1 call represents an individual or family in some form of risk, and timely sharing of information by the 2-1-1 specialist can prevent that risk from compounding into a greater and more complex problem. 2-1-1 helps people maintain their independence while using government and non-profit resources more efficiently to meet their needs.

As these difficult economic times, it is important to have 2-1-1 in place to support all residents of Maryland, especially those who are struggling to make ends meet.

We are appreciative of Senator Zucker's leadership and support with this bill and thank you all for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I welcome any questions.