



1800 Washington Blvd, Suite 340
Baltimore, MD 21230

HB1141 Human Services - 2-1-1 and 3-1-1 Systems - Nonemergency Information and Referrals

Education, Energy, and the Environment Health and Government Operations

March 1, 2024

Testimony of United Way of Central Maryland on behalf of 211 MD Call Centers

Position: Oppose

Thank you Chair and Vice Chair for this opportunity to provide testimony on HB1141 related to 211 and 311 Systems and the management of nonemergency information and referrals. The four Founding Call Centers for the 211 system in Maryland are opposed to this bill as we have many questions and concerns some of which were shared recently in a separate note to Vice Chair Cullison.

An overarching question is how this 211 and 311 bill would work in tandem with HB0353 which largely removes operational oversight of the Maryland Information Network (or MIN) from the Maryland Department of Health.

- Why is this legislation putting 311 and 211 together when they are two different types of services that require a workforce with very different skillsets?
- 211 and 311 are meant to be local services by local experts. We would like to understand why the bill takes the local aspect away from these services.
- To know the skillset of current Crisis Specialists, you need to have the four call center representatives on this Board, which is currently not included.
- Is the DHS aware of the responsibility of this legislation and all costs and fees this tasks them with? Why is DHS the best fit to play this role?

- What will the fiscal note look like for this? Page 10 of the bill speaks of 'dedicated substantial resources.' There are other references to equipment for 311, but no mention of funding for 211.
- The bill references meeting national standards for information and referral. It specifically names the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) which changed its name several months ago to Inform USA. One of the call centers, which owns the 211 MD database, is currently accredited by this organization. There is a concern that MIN does not have the knowledge or expertise in-house around these accreditation standards.
- Our call centers have an onboarding process that follows national best practices for 211 call centers. From our perspective, MIN does not have this knowledge or expertise.
- The board, outside of the Secretary of DHS, does not include any health and human service professionals. It does not appear to include anyone with knowledge of a health and human service-related call center. How will the board evaluate the performance of the call centers without this knowledge or expertise?

We have many more questions and concerns. Suffice it to say, we are opposed to this bill and the 4 Founding Call Centers of the 211 system in Maryland respectfully request an UNFAVORABLE report on HB1141.

Sincerely,



Franklyn Baker
President and CEO
United Way of Central Maryland