

Franklyn Baker Testimony: SB0890 Hearing - March 21, 2023

Good afternoon. I'm Franklyn Baker, President and CEO of United Way of Central Maryland and happy to provide testimony on Senate Bill 0890. For this opportunity, I thank HGO Committee Chairperson Delegate Melnyk and Vice Chairperson Senator Cullison along with Bill Sponsors Senators Zucker and Augustine.

United Way of Central Maryland along with three other 211 Maryland Call Center operators (Community Crisis Center, Life Crisis Center and Mental Health Association of Frederick County) worked together to launch the 211 Maryland system 23 years ago. This included the creation of the nonprofit organization – 211 Maryland Inc. now operating as Maryland Information Network.

These four founding Call Center operators care deeply about ensuring Maryland residents have access to the highest quality of information to support their health and human resources needs. We created 211 Maryland Inc. to serve as a “coordinating” body working in partnership and collaboration with the Founding Call Center operators while being accountable to a Maryland entity – Health and Human Services Referral Board at the time, and more recently, the Maryland Department of Health. This was all done to ensure our voices are heard, our interests are protected, and the people of Maryland are optimally served.

It is our collective view that the Maryland Information Network is not serving the people of Maryland well. Its management is not working effectively with us, they've impeded operations, progress, the future direction of the 211 Maryland System and the information resource industry in Maryland as a whole. With many of their legislative, operational and fundraising actions, they have not worked in collaboration with us.

We have decades of experience and successful outcomes in building and running call centers, delivering on-the-ground 24/7/365, deeply understanding the certification standards and what it takes to keep a growing database updated and relevant, using data from 400,000+ calls per year to make referral and intervention decisions linked to social determinants of health for Marylanders, and shaping strategy and critical partnerships with stakeholders ranging from governments, health care, and nonprofits to corporations and foundations for both immediate urgent needs and the evolution of this vital resource information industry.

We respectfully request that SB0890 is delayed pending more detailed discussions to determine the best way to ensure Maryland residents receive optimal services and support.