



## **United Way of New York State**

Testimony Submitted By:

Brenda Episcopo, President & CEO

United Way of New York State

At the Joint Hearing of the

New York State Assembly Committee on Ways & Means  
&  
New York State Senate Committee on Finance

On the Executive Proposed Human Service Budget

January 24, 2019

Thank you for giving United Way of New York State (UWNYS) the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the 2019-20 Executive Budget. My name is Brenda Episcopo and I am the President and CEO of United Way of New York State, a membership organization representing 36 local United Ways in communities across New York State.

Each day, the United Way helps local communities find solutions to complex problems by working collaboratively to define issues, develop responses and generate resources to implement those responses. Our goal is to strengthen individuals and families by supporting the building blocks for a good quality of life: health, education and financial stability.

In addition to our impact in local communities, I would like to share with you today some statewide initiatives and ask for your support in the 2019-20 budget to maintain, sustain, and build on these exciting initiatives.



#### **What is 2-1-1?**

2-1-1 is a statewide free and confidential health and human service referral hotline that is operated by 2-1-1 New York which is affiliated with United Way of New York State.

#### **When is it accessible?**

2-1-1 is accessible 24 hours a day/365 days of the year and can communicate with callers in more than 170 languages.

#### **Where is 2-1-1?**

2-1-1 operates eight contact centers that together serve all 62 counties across New York State.

#### **How does it work?**

2-1-1 connects residents with a trained operator who evaluates the callers' needs, accesses a database that contains information on over 69,000 programs and 29,000 organizations across NYS, and refers them to the best possible solution.

#### **What resources does it provide?**

2-1-1 provides information on the work of public agencies and private organizations in the fields of social services, public health, law enforcement, homeland security and emergency services, legal assistance, corrections, temporary and disability services, and more.

#### **2-1-1 Website**

In addition to the phone number, the 2-1-1 data bases are available at all times on the web and they are used by millions of people each year who prefer to search for services on their own.

#### **Usage**

New Yorkers are using 2-1-1 everyday. In 2018, 2 million phone calls were made to 2-1-1. In addition, the 2-1-1 website saw over 18 million hits. A number of contact centers are also implementing a texting feature for 2-1-1.

But 2-1-1 is much more than a phone number. Over the last several years, United Way and 2-1-1 have created partnerships with the state, local and federal governments to become a critical resource for a number of specific needs and purposes. I would like to share some of those with you now.

### ***Federal Shutdown***

Most recently 2-1-1 helped New Yorkers effected by the federal shutdown. 2-1-1 contact centers across the state worked to collect all available information for furloughed workers including information on SNAP benefits, unemployment insurance, and other programs and services that individuals could access on a temporary basis. Press releases like the one below from the Goodwill of the Finger Lakes show how 2-1-1 can step in and be a critical resource in times of need:

The screenshot shows a news article from the Goodwill of the Finger Lakes website. The header features the Goodwill logo and navigation links for search, donate, and menu. The main title of the article is "Statement regarding connecting individuals and families impacted by the government shutdown to resources". Below the title, the date "Jan 15, 2019" is listed. The article content discusses the impact of the government shutdown on over 2,000 individuals and families in the area, stating that Goodwill's 2-1-1/LIFE LINE program is ready to connect them to resources for emergency food, housing, and crisis intervention. It quotes Deb Turner, Program Director, saying that with over 6,000 resources, 2-1-1/LIFE LINE is a vital go-to resource. The article also provides information on how to find resources online or through text messaging.

**Statement regarding connecting individuals and families impacted by the government shutdown to resources**

*Jan 15, 2019*

There are more than 2,000 local individuals and families impacted by the ongoing partial government shutdown. At 2-1-1/LIFE LINE, a mission program of Goodwill of the Finger Lakes, we stand ready 24 hours a day, every day, to support our community, including the government employees affected by the furloughs. Dial 2-1-1 any time to talk to a trained telecounselor who can connect you to resources for emergency food, housing, and other crisis intervention information.

"With over 6,000 resources in our database, 2-1-1/LIFE LINE is the vital go-to resource for everyone in our community who may be in crisis or knows someone who may need help. We are available every day to provide you the support you need and connect you to resources and information that will assist you," says Deb Turner, 2-1-1/LIFE LINE Program Director.

In addition to calling, information can be found through the 2-1-1/LIFE LINE website at [www.211lifeline.org](http://www.211lifeline.org). Also, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, those seeking help can text their zip code to 898211 for assistance from a 2-1-1/LIFE LINE telecounselor.

### ***Severe Weather***

State and local officials have also realized the assistance that 2-1-1 can provide and have promoted 2-1-1 as a resource in times of extreme and severe weather. In addition to providing referrals to safe shelter and food, 2-1-1 can also serve as an entity to collect information on need and coordinate with FEMA.

For example, in Buffalo, 2-1-1 provides text notification to over 160 subscribers during a Code Blue. 2-1-1 Central New York is part of a coalition aiming to identify homeless individuals and be sure that they are sheltered during extreme weather. And the City of Albany is partnering with United Way of the Greater Capital Region and 2-1-1 so that seniors and individuals with disabilities can be easily connected with volunteer organizations willing to assist with sidewalk snow removal in times of snow emergencies.



### ***Student Retention***

United Way of Westchester and Putnam County created a pilot with Rockland Community College to promote 2-1-1 on campus as a means to help students address some of the issues they face outside of the classroom that might otherwise cause them to drop out. This partnership resulted in a 30% reduction of late drops for non-academic reasons thereby reducing the overall college dropout rate.

### ***Funding***

2-1-1 is a public private partnership. Over the last several years, thanks to the strong support of the New York State Legislature, 2-1-1 and United Way have been able to enhance this system and create the exciting partnerships I just explained above. With such tremendous momentum, I am here to today to encourage continued state support to maintain this critical service in which local counties, individuals, and families have come to rely.

---

**REQUEST: Please include \$1.5 million in the 2019-20 final budget to maintain 2-1-1 operations so that these partnerships can continue, and others can be created.**

---

# **ALICE Report: Asset, Limited, Income Constrained, Employed**



In 2016, UWNYS commissioned a report that studied the number of employed individuals and families across the State who were above the poverty level, but still struggled to make ends meet- a population that the report refers to as “ALICE” (Asset, Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). Last fall, UWNYS released an updated ALICE Report that shows New Yorkers still face financial hardship despite increases in employment and median income.

The updated report shows that over the last few years, the economy has rebounded and the state has made investments to assist those living in poverty. However, there is still a large number of New Yorkers, **3.2 million, or 45% of the overall population**, that cannot afford the basic needs and lack sufficient income and resources to pay for housing, food, child care, transportation, and health care. The report continues to show that ALICE lives in ever part of the state, from our biggest cities to our most rural areas.

It is with the data collected and analyzed in this report that United Way of New York State asks for the Legislature’s support for critical assistance for the State’s working individuals and families so more people across the state can live in financial security:

## **Who is ALICE?**

ALICE is your child care worker, your parent on Social Security, the cashier at your supermarket, the gas attendant, the salesperson at your big box store, your waitress, a home health aide, an office clerk. ALICE cannot always pay the bills, has little or nothing in savings, and is forced to make tough choices such as deciding between quality child care or paying the rent. One unexpected car repair or medical bill can push these financially strapped families over the edge.

---

## **REQUEST: Please support expanding and strengthening New York’s working family tax credits including:**

**Expanding the state’s child tax credit (Empire State Child Credit) to cover children under age four, and double the credit for young children.**

**Expanding and strengthening the state’s Earned Income Tax Credit by increasing the percentage of the federal credit paid to families from 30% to 40%; and expanding the credit for young adults without children (under age 25) who are currently ineligible for either the federal or state credit.**

**Doubling the amount of child care expenses creditable under the state’s Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) to better reflect the true cost of care and enable more middle-income families to afford high-quality child care.**

---

## **Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI)**

Governor Cuomo created the Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI) to develop local task forces in sixteen communities across the state with high poverty rates. In nine (9) of these sixteen (16) communities, the local United Way has been leading the local ESPRI effort based on their experience as convener in the community and their efforts to reduce poverty. Although in different stages, these ESPRI task forces are working to identify high-need areas and develop recommendations for investments and other changes to reduce the number of individuals living in poverty. With the collective input of United Way led ESPRI areas, we once again see a number of areas of synergy for public policy. With so much work done, but much yet ahead, United Way of New York State strongly encourages the Legislature to continue funding for this very important initiative so that United Way and other organizations can continue to look for ways tackle poverty in communities across New York State.

---

**REQUEST: Please support \$4.5 million included in the Governor's 2019-20 Executive Budget to continue supporting the 16 communities in the Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI).**

---

In closing, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony. United Way of New York State looks forward to continuing to work with the state to ensure that all New Yorkers can achieve their full potential.