

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6856

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE 2-1-1 INFOLINE SYSTEM.

Vote Date: 3/23/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/7/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

Co-Sponsors of Bill:

Rep. Anne M. Hughes, 135th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The 2-1-1 Infoline is one of the quickest ways to connect people with the services they need. The pandemic and rising inflation have tripled call volume and requests for assistance. Funding has decreased, but demand for and cost complexity of delivering information and referral services has increased. This bill will require the Department of Social Services to transfer sufficient funding to the United Way of Connect to make the 2-1-1 Infoline twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language requires the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management to designate a staff member to coordinate state agency contracts with 2-1-1 and allocate sufficient funding so it could operate 24-7.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Department of Social Services, Commissioner, Andrea Barton-Reeves; opposes this bill stating there are not enough available resources to provide additional funding to 2-1-1 nor is additional funding available in the Governor's budget. It is stated DSS is not sure what level of funding is required to meet 'sufficient funding'.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

The following individuals representing United Way of Connecticut submitted testimony in support of this bill. It is stated that 2-1-1 helps Connecticut residents thrive through partnerships with providers and communities and maximizes the help that is available to those who need it. It is stated 2-1-1's database consists of over 40,000 community resources and information about 23 state and federal benefits. It is stated that funding has decreased over the years resulting in 17 frontline staff available to provide information and referral services. It is also stated that even with this decrease in funding, there has been an increase in demand for services from 2-1-1 from mental health services to housing resources. It is suggested providing an additional 13 resource navigators through sufficient funding will lead to improvement in services, will allow more callers to receive assistance and resources, and will lead to a decrease in wait time to under 3 minutes.

United Way of Connecticut, President & CEO, Lisa Tepper Bates

United Way of Connecticut, Director of Communications, Carin Buckman

United Way of Connecticut, President and Chief Executive Director, Dina Graves

United Way of Connecticut, Senior Vice President, Partnerships, Development and Communication, Amy Cassavina Hall

United Way of Central and Northeast Connecticut, President & CEO, Eric Harrison

Greenwich United Way, CEO, David Rabin

United Way of Connecticut, Contact Center Specialist, Alicia Washington

United Way of Central and Northeast Connecticut, Board of Directors, Michael Goldbas

Connecticut Foodshare, Chief of Staff, Jennie Hirsch; supports this bill stating they direct individuals to call 2-1-1 to get additional resources and support while also using the platform to confirm the location of services like medical facilities, shelters, or social service offices. It is stated 2-1-1's call data has been useful when determining which areas have various levels of need and where there may be spikes so it can be addressed, and residents are being assisted.

Keep the Promise Coalition, Coordinator & Community Organizer, John Fairfield; supports this bill stating that 2-1-1 is a service that Connecticut residents rely on during crucial moments. It is stated that members have reported difficulties in receiving assistance from 2-1-1, especially for housing-related needs, which can lead to people not having access to critical services or resources.

Stamford Health, President & CEO, Kathleen Silard; supports this bill stating housing is a priority amongst Stamford residents according to a recent survey. It is stated these results are also supported by the United Way's 211 Counts database as there was an increase in calls to 2-1-1 related to housing from the Stamford area in the first quarter of 2022, therefore, having increased funding will allow residents to get assistance.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None stated.

Reported by: Maureen O'Reilly

Date: March 29, 2023