

Good Morning,

My name is David Holland and I serve as the Manager of Mile High United Way's 2-1-1 Help Center, which serves the Metro Denver area and Northern Colorado. I've been with the 2-1-1 program for over 4 years.

2-1-1 is a national service that began operating in Colorado in 2003.

2-1-1 is confidential service that specializes in helping people find and learn about resources and services within their community when one needs help.

Friends and family are typically first on the list, but what happens when they're not able to help, or you don't have a personal network to lean on?

Typically, people begin calling the well-known resources, usually to hear, "We don't provide that service", or "we don't serve your area", or "we only serve --- families with children, seniors, veterans, etc.".

In Colorado, there are thousands of agencies ready to help, but connecting to the right one at the right time can be extremely difficult.

That's where 2-1-1 is most helpful.

2-1-1 is an easy to remember number with trained bilingual professionals who are available to help guide people to services and problem solve by phone, text, live chat, email, and face to face in some communities.

In March of this year, at the request of Governor Jared Polis, our 2-1-1 at Mile High United Way expanded its capacity to connect metro Denver residents who have been impacted by COVID-19 to vital community resources.

We specialize in navigating over 7,500 community resources, such as affordable housing resources, rental and security deposit assistance, utility assistance, food resources, legal services, medical services, and so much more.

With the onset of COVID, we expanded that set of 7,500 community resources to include COVID specific supports and resources. Locally, regionally and statewide,

new and additional resources were needed and implemented to help those impacted by this pandemic.

By partnering with local non-profits, local and state government agencies, we have the most comprehensive set of information and resources that are available in Colorado so when clients call into 2-1-1, we can provide them with current and up-to-date information to best meet their need. We've also begun listing COVID test sites as we know that is a common need of our community right now.

We have a team that personally curates each resource within our database, sometimes updating the same resource multiple times per month to ensure our clients receive accurate information and referrals.

However, 2-1-1 is much more than a place that provides navigation.

It's a service that truly listens to the situations that Coloradan's face and depending on the scenario, deliver units of hope in the form of referrals or deliver a tough message that the service one is trying to find just doesn't exist, and then helping to identify alternative options.

At Mile High United Way's 2-1-1 Help Center, we've received over 1.6 million requests for help since 2003.

In the time period beginning with the COVID hit of mid-March through the present, Mile High United Way's 2-1-1 Help Center has received over 37,000 calls for help. In a single day, we received over 2,000 calls for help. Our pre-COVID normal average was 330 calls a day.

At first, an individual asking for help with their car payment can sound like a situation many people face. However, when you listen closer, such as the call that we recently received, you'll hear that someone's living out of their car and working as a delivery driver. A simple car payment can be much more than that if you listen.

Our Mile High United Way's 2-1-1 Help Center gathers preliminary client information over the phone for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. We explain expectations for documentation and next steps before submitting the information to be officially processed by the appropriate county agency. Last fiscal year we supported just over 1050 applications; however, just between

March 1, 2020 and June 10, 2020, we submitted just over 1200 applications. Many of these additional applications were identified during the conversation when people call to address other challenges they encountered due to the COVID hit.

I appreciate your consideration of **HB 1197**, as do the hundreds of individuals that rely on our service each day to help guide them to a resource that might help.

Good Morning everyone.

My Name is Laura De La Torre and I'm a SNAP Navigator at Mile High United Way's 2-1-1.

I would like to share my personal story of "Why I chose to work at United Way's 2-1-1" and why I ask for your support of **HB 1197**

14 years ago, I was a 17 year old single mom of 2 kids, living in a Studio with a job but no extra money for utilities or Christmas gifts. I was a user of 2-1-1 in the past and decided to call again because I knew the help was there. When I called 2-1-1 a Navigator gave me resources to pay my utilities as well as resources to help with Christmas gifts. Because it was in December, she was not sure if the holiday resources would still be available.

I felt so hopeless and I think she heard that through the tone of my voice over the phone. She then started asking me questions about my age and my children's age. At first I was a little hesitant to tell her my age because as a single teen mom, I was frequently judged when people found out my age. I told her the ages of my kids, who at the time were 2 years old and 6 months old. She then told me "your children are really little; they won't remember the gifts you give them, but they will remember that everything you have provided for them is being done with love."

After the call, I realized the Navigator gave me something much more than resources.

She gave me hope.

That message stuck with me. I provide for my children what they need with all the love in the world and they know that.

In 2018, I was in a similar place needing gifts for Christmas. It was Sunday night and I was able to look for help because 2-1-1 has resources available to the public online 24-7. I also provided some resources to my coworkers who at the time were in the same situation and it made me feel good.

While online I saw that United Way was hiring and I took a chance by applying for the position. Now I am here serving others as a Navigator.

One week into my training, I hear this navigator's voice, that voice who gave me a message of hope 14 years ago, this voice that every time I felt out of luck or stressed because I didn't have enough money to provide what my kids wanted and only what they needed.

Hope is what encouraged me to apply at 2-1-1 because I also wanted to do that for someone who needed it.

MaryAnn is the name of the Community Resource Navigator who helped me when I was 17 years old and who after 15 years is still there providing the help clients need.

That is what 2-1-1 is all about, we are here because some of us know what it's like to need help, and we want our clients to know that there is someone on the other end of the line who wants to help them today.

That is the power of 2-1-1, and how it changes lives.

Thank you for listening and for considering your support of **HB 1197**.

Madam/Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to testify on **HB 1197**

I am here today representing Mile High United Way in support of **HB 1197**.

My name is Stephanie Sanchez

I'm the 211 Colorado Senior Director

I provide oversight and coordination of the 2-1-1 program here in our state.

I've been with Mile High United Way and the 2-1-1 program for 15 years

At 2-1-1, we connect people with a need, to services that can help.

During 2019, 2-1-1 Colorado received more than **151,000** requests for help. And more than **77,000** online searches on our publicly accessible database.

Since 2004, 2-1-1 Colorado has received more than **2.5 million calls** from people who need help.

87% of callers would recommend 2-1-1 to family and friends

In 2002, the Public Utilities Commission granted the 2-1-1 dial code to the 2-1-1 Colorado Collaborative.

This Collaborative consists of 7 non-profit agencies that host 4 call centers providing the 2-1-1 service for the entire state.

2-1-1 in Colorado has been funded by these seven agencies since its inception in 2002.

As the years pass, the demand increases and these agencies find it increasingly difficult to sustain the program.

The operation costs to provide 2-1-1, a first-stop shop for help, is more than \$3 million annually.

Most of the costs are covered by funding from our individual donors, through our annual fundraising campaigns.

And we know that philanthropy giving is declining, particularly in rural areas.

In facing this situation, the United Way of Weld County, the United Way of Larimer County and Mile High United Way collectively identified a solution to continue providing quality services in the northern part of Colorado through consolidation into Mile High United Way's 2-1-1 Help Center.

But again, general fundraising is challenging and affecting all of our 2-1-1s.

Early this year, as COVID-19 gripped Colorado, developments and orders progress each day. To respond to the need for widespread public access to reliable, up-to-date information, the Governor's office recognized the need for a central point of contact for COVID-related information for Colorado residents.

2-1-1 was asked to serve as a primary source for COVID-related information and referrals.

Since COVID-19 hit Colorado, community members need help now more than ever. Some common requests we have heard include: seeking clarification about the public health and Executive Orders that have been issued, looking for agencies that may assist with emergency COVID-related rent, mortgage, and utilities financial assistance, or inquiring about drive-thru or delivery food distribution options.

Recent developments have also included responding to calls related to potential COVID-related discrimination concerns or helping clients navigate how to get personal protective equipment, like face masks or gloves.

We are all experiencing dramatic, unprecedented changes in our lives and are parsing out our new norm. 2-1-1 will continue to be a constant for the community - now just as before - and provide information and resources for those in need.

Over the past 12 weeks, (from the time the first initial stay-at-home order went into place mid-March to present), 2-1-1 Colorado has received nearly 55,000 calls from people seeking help. Some of our 2-1-1 centers here in Colorado have seen up to four times the normal daily volume of calls and requests.

Some calls to 2-1-1 have simple answers and some calls are complex situations.

At 2-1-1 we help uncomplicate the complicated.

Studies show that people seeking services call 7 to 8 agencies before finding the right one.

Another study showed its more like 11-13 calls.

Most folks give up after several calls, assuming there is no help, when in fact, there is.

Without 2-1-1, many people give up and never get the help they need.

We have all, at one time or another, tried to navigate the confusing maze of services to find the one that can help our individual and unique situation.

In this unprecedented time, it is most critical to ensure that people can get the help they need, quickly and easily.

People whose jobs, childcare, food/meals, housing, transportation or other basic needs have been impacted by the pandemic can call 2-1-1.

We believe 2-1-1 is a valuable service to everyone in our state and

We need to assure 2-1-1 remains available to Coloradoans.

Thank you for your time.

Good Morning.

Thank you for this opportunity to share information with you today.

My name is Christie Higgins and I am representing Hilltop Community Resources, a non-profit agency Grand Junction in support of HB 1197.

Hilltop Community Resources is the host agency for Western CO 2-1-1, one of the 4 2-1-1 call centers in Colorado. We serve 16 counties on the western slope. I serve at the Community Access director, overseeing the 2-1-1 program. I have been with Hilltop and 2-1-1 for almost 7 years.

In addition to all the reasons why 2-1-1 is important that have already been stated, 2-1-1 is a vital resource on the western side of the state. Much of our area is rural and many counties work together to support the needs of their residents. This can be a very confusing and difficult road to navigate. 2-1-1 provides a place where all of that important resource information is housed. Instead of someone having to call around to several agencies in several different counties, they just need to call one number to get information on what services they may qualify for and in which counties. Often times people don't even realize that many agencies provide services in several different counties or that they could go to another near-by county to get assistance. 2-1-1 resource navigators ask the important questions to ensure that the person needing help gets connected to the services they need no matter where they live.

2-1-1 also supports the local community agencies providing the assistance by giving them a place to refer to when someone needs more help than they can give. We have been told by agencies such as Catholic Outreach, local food banks, schools, housing programs, and medical offices that 2-1-1 is a vital resource for their staff as well. Many of the people seeking services from these agencies have multiple, complex needs and it is impossible for local social service agencies to stay on top of what services other agencies provide. This is where the value of 2-1-1 comes in. 2-1-1 is an integral part of the local community landscape, helping to create a connection point for both service agencies and the people that need assistance. We have assisted several callers in rural areas who have hit walls trying to get services and are now hanging on by a thread. Because of the relationships we have created, we are able to reach out to the agencies on behalf of the caller to better help connect that person to services. 2-1-1 provides support and connection to help stabilize a person's situation.

We see many people needing assistance with housing and transportation in the rural areas. Not only are these some of our top needs they are also the needs that have some of the fewest resources and many people do not know how to access what does exist, especially in rural areas. 2-1-1 provides that first step in finding out what services are available. For some it could be a 30 min or more drive to the nearest town. And if they don't know what services exist or if they even qualify for services, that is a long way to drive just to turn around empty handed. 2-1-1 is a life line for those in rural parts of the state and we are asking for help in ensure that that life line can continue.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has solidified all of the reasons that 2-1-1 is a vital resources state-wide. On the western slope it has been even more important for there to be a place to go for the latest resources related to COVID. We saw a large influx of services popping up and worked with our community partners across the western slope to gather the information to disseminate quickly and efficiently to those who needed it the most. We saw over a 25% increase in calls from the most rural

counties in our region. Showing the need for there to be a state-wide “go to” resource such as 2-1-1. And even as things stable a little, some services are returning to normal and the call volume has dropped from the initial surge, we are finding that 2-1-1 remains a vital resource for people and they continue to struggle and recover from the effects of COVID.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Good Morning Madam/Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to testify on HB 1197.

My name is Cindy Aubrey and I am the President and CEO of Pikes Peak United Way and a 4th generation Coloradan. I have been in my position for four years.

I am here today representing Pikes Peak United Way and 2-1-1 in support of HB 1197

At 2-1-1 in Colorado Springs, we are serving a broad cross section of our communities. We have senior citizens, single moms, veterans and active military who call our 2-1-1 line. We take between 35 and 40 thousand calls every year. We serve 12 counties including Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Chaffee, Cheyenne, El Paso, Lincoln, Mineral, Park, Rio Grande, Saguache and Teller. Given all we have experienced with COVID 19, the landscape has changed considerably.

On March 12, Pikes Peak United Way activated a standing agreement that we have with the Regional Office of Emergency Management, which means that in the event of a disaster or catastrophic event, PPUW will help with whatever is needed by the City, County and OEM. After the COVID outbreak, we were asked to assist by becoming the call center for the Public Health Department – that meant that the majority of our Pikes Peak United Way staff began taking 100 % of the calls for El Paso County Public Health – seven days a week, from 8am to 8pm. We did take calls for Teller County Health for one month. To date, we have taken nearly 15,000 phone calls. Meanwhile, our 2-1-1 call volume increased 200% and we had to hire three more people just to take calls. The majority of the calls were for food, rent and utilities assistance. To answer the need for food, we partnered with Care and Share Food Bank, COSIlove you, Silver Key, Salvation Army and Crossfire Ministries - with each nonprofit filling a role to get a box of food delivered to a homebound resident needing food.

In addition, we partnered with our local Community Foundation to raise desperately needed money, distributing it quickly, and confirming to our community the value that United Way brings every day. To raise this money, we had to suspend our traditional fundraising and now we are working very hard to get as close to our goal as possible.

During the year, the majority of our callers are seeking housing assistance – either a place to live, help with rent or a hotel voucher. Next is utilities assistance, followed by locating a food pantry. There are many needs after that – from domestic violence to job assistance to finding access to healthcare. We draw on over 2,000 community resources to offer help to residents who are calling. We are constantly updating our list of resources so that those seeking assistance will not call an agency or office that is no longer providing services.

Our staff has bilingual call specialists who have been with 2-1-1 for several years. Our 2-1-1 manager is a Veteran Marine who is uniquely qualified to assist our Veteran callers.

We work closely with both El Paso County and the City of Colorado Springs. Our El Paso County Commissioners are unanimously in support of HB 1197 with the amendment to exclude the child welfare hotline.

We at Pikes Peak United Way believe that we must take care of our neighbors who have fallen on tough times. That can be the difference in a life well lived or a life full of stress and strain. 2-1-1 is that lifeline, that tool for many in our region.

Thank you all for your service to our community and for considering funding these most worthwhile organizations.