Subject Line: **211 and the 2021-22 Budget**

Dear Senator:

On behalf of callers across the state who have continuously relied on 211 before, during, and likely well after the COVID-19 pandemic, **I write to respectfully request a total of $2 million in funding be included in the 2021-22 budget for continued operations of 211 New York.**

As you can imagine, the 211 system saw a huge surge in activity last year as the COVID-19 pandemic caused anxiety, confusion, and questions for millions of New Yorkers. The 211 network in New York State fully mobilized to meet new challenges by partnering with the state and local governments to better address the extraordinary demand for COVID-19 related information, as well as the downstream effects of an immediate public health crisis and financial downfall including food, housing, day care and on-going assistance with government benefits (unemployment, SNAP, etc.).

For perspective, the first three quarters of 2019 saw 1.34 million referrals in responses to phone, text, chat or email inquiries. The same period for 2020 saw 3.59 million referrals. **That exemplifies a 168% increased need for 211.**

**Sustained funding for 211 is needed more than ever.** Contact centers have experienced increased costs for technology and staffing. Cash flow and diminishing resources continue to strain the network, which is the result of extremely late payments on the 2019/20 state contract and no action, as of January 1st, on the 2020/21 legislative grant. Historically, funding provided by the Legislature has enabled 211 to become operational 24/7/365 in all 62 counties across the state. **Without this support, 211 would not have been able to be there for so many New Yorkers who needed assistance over the last several months.**

While 2021 has brought new hope, it will take months for the vaccine to be effective in combating COVID-19 and years for our economy to rebound. 211 wants to continue to be that safety net, but we need our partners in government to sustain support.

**As a one of your constituents, I ask that you request and support a total of $2 million in funding be included in the 2021-22 budget for continued operations of 211 New York.**

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.