

**NJ Telecommunications & Utilities Committee
Testimony of Laura Zink Marx
Executive Director, NJ 2-1-1 Partnership**

Good morning Mr. Chairman and committee members. It is my pleasure to be here today to update you on the fourth year of statewide 2-1-1 service available by landline, cell phone, VOIP, instant messaging and the internet. As you know, 2-1-1 is a three digit dialing code, set aside by the FCC in 2000 for distribution of health and human service information. The NJ BPU assigned the use and administration of the 2-1-1 dialing code to the NJ 2-1-1 Partnership in October 2002.

I will provide a brief overview of our current service and operations and the impact 2-1-1 is having on the lives of NJ residents and the local community by efficiently connecting people to services. **Our unit cost is \$4.32/unit.** We received over 340,000 requests for resource information in the past year alone with our internet requests climbing 600% since May of 2008. Utilizing the dialing code and providing relevant resource at the 2-1-1 web site has allowed us to achieve the greatest cost efficiency while maintaining a tight control over quality performance based on a set of national call standards and contact protocol.

Today, we offer a variety of service

- **A Free, Easy to Remember Public Information Portal supported by two local information and referral agencies with a long history of providing I&R services in the state of NJ.**
People will call 2-1-1 24/7, 365 days a year, because it is compassionate, neutral and anonymous and does not require people to "label" their need. In addition, having an easy to remember portal, that can be activated in an emergency has proven invaluable in communities across the US and in NJ. We answered over 27,000 calls last quarter. As you might anticipate, 28% of the calls are for Temporary Financial Assistance of which 32% are requests for Utility Assistance, Housing (14%) and mental health services (16%). Calls continue to rise, with some counties experiencing up to a 30% increase in requests for assistance.
- **A Reliable, Comprehensive Human Services Database:** 2-1-1 provides continuously, updated human service web-based database for everyone, including social workers, legislative assistants, hospital discharge planners, nurses, educators and others trying to help people. Currently, there are over 7500 agencies listed with over 12,000 program records. We are currently adding 12,000 new records of services in the Philadelphia region. Over a million searches have occurred over the past year.
- **Case Coordination Made Easy—** We have pioneered electronic service coordination systems in NJ by offering easy to use web based applications that address real issues facing service providers throughout the state (psychiatric bed availability, kinship portal and a pilot shelter bed page). These systems will save staff time by allowing real time entry of a callers' basic information, needs

and service requests. A secure e-mail system between human service workers is often built into these case coordination systems.

- **Resource Library:** We have seen tremendous growth through our postings of relevant resource pages and guides. Our Help in Hard Times section alone has provided 33,000 unique visitors an opportunity to explore a wealth of resources that address today's pressing concerns; such as avoiding foreclosure or surviving a layoff.
- **Public Policy Statistics:** Because of the high volume of contacts and the structured nature of the assistance, 2-1-1 creates a real-time source of data on people's needs. This provides an "instant focus group" which can serve as the basis for policy making and fund distribution.

We fund our operations through a public private partnership. Our **\$1.5 M budget** is comprised of support from the State legislature and departments for 39% of our total FY '09 budget, the United Ways of NJ at 50% and the remainder are one time grants and small donations.

In anticipation of a very tight FY '10 budget year, NJ 2-1-1 has pursued **cost saving measures** that include expansion of 2-1-1 service into the Philadelphia region on a contractual basis and continuing after hours coverage for the state of Rhode Island. These contracts allow us to significantly offset infrastructure and business costs. We are also actively educating our Federal representatives about the benefits of the Calling for 2-1-1 Act which will provide Federal dollars to support 2-1-1 nationally. In addition, a consolidation strategy was presented to the Governor's office that suggests utilize the 2-1-1 dialing code and companion web site to

1. integrate existing 800 lines and the administrative support of those lines where there is a connection to health and human services
2. eliminate per line and minute charges by eliminating 800 lines
3. consolidate existing or planned human service databases, search applications or resource guides into one 2-1-1 database repository eliminating duplicative maintenance efforts across departments
4. incorporate existing and planned web based applications into the 2-1-1 system (i.e., NJ Find a Ride) eliminating the need for contracted web services and ongoing resource maintenance.

Studies done in Texas and Nebraska reported that I&R across state department functions are often carried out by program staff taking valuable time away from assigned duties due to misdirected calls, no established call criteria and outdated resources resulting in varying levels of service across 800 lines causing confusion for the caller and frustration for the staff. In Pa, a cost savings of \$2.2 M was identified with the consolidation of just 7 help lines within 4 departments alone!

NJ 2-1-1 has a proven record in providing a **cost efficient portal** through the EITC program, Kinship Navigation Program, Special Need Registry and the Housing Resource Center. For the 2007 tax year, 956 M (a 9% increase) in Earned income Tax dollars were returned to hard working NJ families. 2-1-1 is the marketed portal for EITC

information for both the IRS and the State of NJ. 2-1-1 actively markets EITC as a means to address the top financial assistance concern expressed by our callers and as a source for information on how and where to receive assistance in filing a tax return. Our web pages dedicated to this information saw a 300% increase over last year, so hopefully even more EITC dollars will be realized in NJ for the 2008 tax year.

The successful integration of the Kinship Navigator program's 8xx line occurred last November. Technology made it possible to streamline the referral process so the caregiver can connect with kinship services in a timely manner. 2-1-1 also provides immediate assistance to the caregiver, as a call to 2-1-1 is often brought on by the new arrival of children at a relative's home, causing much stress and anxiety for the family. Having 2-1-1 available 24/7 to answer the calls of caregivers and to begin the registration process, has proven very successful for the caregivers, kinship navigation agencies and the Division of Family Department.

In conclusion, I would like to provide feedback from the callers to 2-1-1. In May, we instituted a caller survey that can be completed at the end of every call. There are four questions where we ask the caller to answer yes or no. Of the question

1. **Did you feel as if the person you just spoke with cared about your situation?** 878 said yes, 15 no
2. **Did the person you just spoke with give you information that was useful?** 867 yes, 15 no
3. **Were you treated with respect during the call?** 874 yes, 4 no
4. **Would you recommend 2-1-1 to a friend in need?** 868 yes, 8 no

We take the quality of the call, the efficiency of our service and our role as administrator of the 2-1-1 dialing code very seriously and will continue to seek improvements and to offer our service to the State of NJ.