

United Way of Central Maryland
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211 Maryland United Way Helpline

Written Testimony in Support of SB 905

Home Energy Assistance – Silver Energy Savings Program

Senate Finance Committee

March 1, 2022

Thank you, Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Franklyn Baker. I am the President and CEO of United Way of Central Maryland that houses the 211 Maryland United Way Helpline that serves central Maryland.

211 Maryland United Way Helpline strongly supports SB 905, which allows the Silver Energy Savings program to reduce barriers for seniors 60 years and older. This bill will expand the reach for those seeking assistance for home energy programs.

211 is a number people can call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days in the year, in over 150 languages, and speak to a live person when facing a crisis and need help. There are four 211 call centers in Maryland. The largest call center is operated by United Way and serves the central Maryland region, including Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard Counties. Last year we received over 146,463 calls from Maryland residents in need. Due to the pandemic, our callers requesting medically related assistance such as COVID test sites and public health information increased 95%. The governor dedicated 211 as the number to call statewide on COVID-19 resources and the governor's declarations. With that, we saw the most significant increase in need surrounding medical, food, housing, and utilities for Marylanders.

SB 905 will allow 211 Maryland United Way Helpline to expand their role when speaking to callers dealing with a crisis. 211 Maryland United Way Helpline will not only help close the gap of those in need over the phone but connect them to other resources that your constituents faced, such as food and housing stabilization that has increased due to COVID-19.

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All of our staff at 211 have a background in social work or counseling. We are certified by the Alliance for Information and Referral Services (AIRS), which is the highest certification available for information and referral providers in the human services industry. We also have staff that have been certified through AIRS as Community Resource Specialist – Aging and Disability (CRS-A/D) specialists. We are primed to take on the role of default navigator for eligible seniors 60 years and older.

On behalf of 211 Maryland United Way Helpline serving central Maryland, I strongly encourage the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 905. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Franklyn Baker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Franklyn Baker
President and CEO
United Way of Central Maryland