



Testimony Submitted By:
Therese Daly President & CEO of United Way of New York State

Executive Proposed Human Service Budget

February 7, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger, Pretlow, Persaud, Davila, Hevesi and Brisport as well as distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today to elevate essential priorities for United Way of New York State. My name is Therese Daly, and I am the President & CEO of United Way of New York State (UWNYS).

The core mission of the United Way is to be a leader and advocate for community solutions. Every day, the 32 local United Ways work with local communities to help find solutions to complex problems. They collaboratively with community partners to define issues that impact the health, education and financial stability of individuals and families across New York. Through this collaboration, the United Way network develops responses and generates resources by mobilizing the power of donors, volunteers, and community partners to give, volunteer and advocate for people in need. Annually the network invests more than \$160 million in communities statewide - a staggering statistic that speaks volumes to our capabilities and value.

As the new President & CEO of UWNYS, I look forward to working with the Legislature, Executive, State agencies, and our local government partners to find ways to assist those in need, whether on a day-to-day basis, or in times of a natural disaster or a state of emergency. While the United Way network, in combination with 2-1-1, helped New Yorkers through COVID, the work has continued, needs have increased, and response to weather related events is now a new normal. Unfortunately, due to on-going changes at the federal level, continued inflation, and

identified food and housing insecurity, leveraging of community-based organizations and the need for a dependable, easy to access information source is needed now more than ever.

Last summer, UWNYS released an updated report on ALICE (Asset, Limited, Income, Constrained Employed), entitled ALICE in the Crosscurrents: An Update on Financial Hardship in New York¹. If you are not familiar with ALICE, ALICE is in every community, and unfortunately, the number of ALICE households in New York has reached a new high and exceeds the national average. Here are just a few statewide statistics:

- The number of ALICE families has increased from 43% to 46% from 2019 to 2022.
- The basic cost for a family of 4 (infants & preschoolers) to live in NY is \$101,952.00.
- Households over the age of 65 are the fastest growing ALICE population. 1.2 million New Yorkers (56%) fall below the ALICE threshold.
- 69% of New Yorkers under the age of 25 continue to struggle.
- Regionally the ALICE breakdown is 55% of NYC; 32% surrounding NYC; and 41% rest of state.

While New York has made significant investments into social and economic policies, the State continues to fall short of alleviating the root cause of financial instability.

UWNYS public policy agenda, based on prioritizing local needs, supports ALICE, and aligns with our goal to develop responses and to generate local resources that help create financial stability. This year, the network identified the following priorities:

- Affordable and safe housing
- Access to high-quality and affordable childcare
- Early childhood development
- Food insecurity (including SNAP and free school meals)
- Workforce development (job training, higher wages, and transportation access)
- Financial assistance with rent and utilities
- Behavioral, mental health, and substance abuse.

To continue to support our impact on local communities, UWNYS is once again seeking your support for essential priorities to be included the 2025-2026 Enacted State Budget. Your support will help United Way maintain, sustain, and build on these effective initiatives.

2-1-1 New York

We are requesting a \$2.8 million investment in the SFY 25-26 budget, a \$400,000 increase over last year's enacted budget, to maintain and expand access to 2-1-1.

2-1-1 is a statewide free and confidential health and human services referral hotline that is operated by 2-1-1 New York, which is affiliated with United Way of New York State. 2-1-1 is accessible 24 hours a day/365 day a year in over 170 languages, enabling residents to relate to a

¹ <https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/new-york>

trained operator who evaluates the callers' needs, accesses a database that contains information on programs and organizations across NYS, and refers them to the best possible solution. Statewide texting is also now an option. New Yorkers can now text their zip code to 898-211 with questions or to get connected to services.

2-1-1 provides information on the work of both public agencies and private organizations in the fields of social services, public health, law enforcement, homeland security and emergency services, legal assistance, corrections, temporary and disability services, and more. New Yorkers are using 2-1-1 every day. In 2024, there was an average of 2.5+ million phone calls made to 2-1-1- statewide.

But 2-1-1 is more than a telephone number. Over its 20+ year history, the 2-1-1 system has created both local and statewide partnerships, leveraging the system to ensure that New Yorkers have access to the information and referrals they need when they need them most. For example:

- **2-1-1 Contributes to Disaster Planning, Relief and Recovery Efforts.** During several of the most impactful storms in recent history, including but not limited to Hurricane Sandy, Tropical Storm Lee, the Oneida/Herkimer County flooding, Western New York snowstorms, the most recent tornados last summer in Oneida and Syracuse regions, 2-1-1 provided access to reliable, up-to-date, relevant information for those impacted, first responders, and long-term recovery groups. In many counties, 2-1-1 is recognized as a member of disaster operations for training, exercises, and response. FEMA promotes 2-1-1 as the number to call for information and referral.
- **Flooding in Steuben and Allegany Counties** – 2-1-1 Community Resource Specialists offered more than 150 referrals to shelter, food, disaster care management, NYS DHSES Damage Self-Reporting tool, and the Emergency Assistance HCR NYS Homeowner Storm Repair Grant. 2-1-1 received recognition from the FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaison for their work connecting flood survivors to resources available through the Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD), county and state agencies.
- **2-1-1 Helps our Fiscally Strapped Counties.** Several local Departments of Social Services use 2-1-1 for call routes and pre-screening, as well as providing after-hours on-call services for adult/child protective services and homeless/food emergencies. For Monroe and Onondaga Counties, 2-1-1 operators are the first point of contact for the homeless, shelters and services. Numerous counties across the state rely on 2-1-1 for CODE Blue services to provide a warm place to stay when outdoor temperatures are below 32 degrees.

**GET CONNECTED.
GET HELP.**

211

211 New York Regions

211 WNY – 211wny.org

Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, Wyoming

211/Life Line – 211lifeline.org

Cayuga, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne

211 Helpline – 211helpline.org

Allegany, Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Yates

211 Tompkins/Cortland – 211tompkins.org

Cortland, Tompkins

211 CNY – 211cny.org

Jefferson, Lewis, Onondaga, Oswego, St. Lawrence

211 Susquehanna River Region – helpme211.org

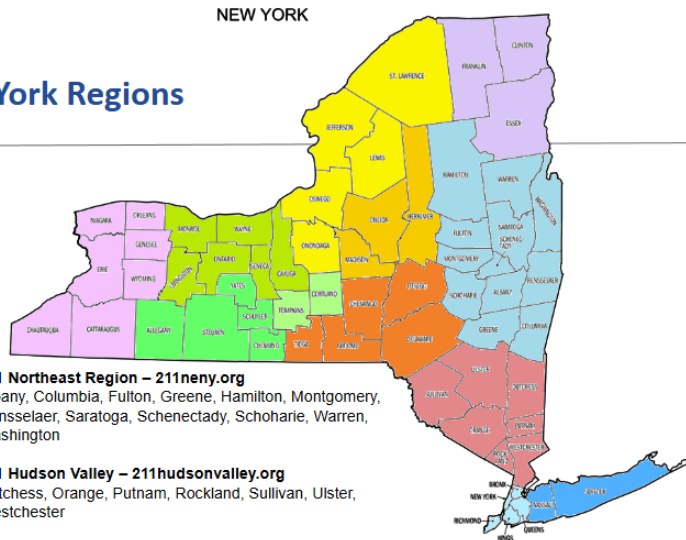
Broome, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego, Tioga

211 Mid-York

Herkimer, Madison, Oneida

211 ADK – 211adk.org

Counties Served: Clinton, Essex, Franklin



211 Northeast Region – 211neny.org

Albany, Columbia, Fulton, Greene, Hamilton, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Warren, Washington

211 Hudson Valley – 211hudsonvalley.org

Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster, Westchester

211 NYC – nyc.gov/311

Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, Richmond

211 Long Island – 211li.org

Nassau, Suffolk



While call volume has decreased since the pandemic, calls today are more complex and require additional time by call representatives to resolve. Those seeking assistance are usually in need of multiple referrals and many are calling seeking assistance for the first time. In addition, to calls becoming more complex, the 2-1-1 system is responding more for weather related events or emergencies and there is no reimbursement back to the system for overtime, increased calls, or enhancements that have been made. The additional funding requested this year will help the system make necessary improvements and to provide additional resources to the call centers. We also anticipate call volume to increase in relation to changes at the federal level. This year's request for \$2.8 million will help ensure the system is there to assist.

211 NY Top Needs by Region

WNY	Finger Lakes	Southern Tier	Tompkins Cortland	Susquehanna	CNY	MidYork	ADK	Capital Region	Hudson Valley	NYC	Long Island
Housing	Housing	Food & Meals	Housing	Food & Meals	Housing	Housing	Housing	Income Support & Assistance	Income Support & Assistance	Food & Meals	Housing
Income Support & Assistance	Mental Health & Addiction Services	Housing	Income Support & Assistance	Income Support & Assistance	Food & Meals	Income Support & Assistance	Information Services	Housing	Government & Economic Services	Legal, Consumer, Public Safety	Information Services
Food & Meals	Food & Meals	Information Services	Information Services	Housing	Legal, Consumer & Public Safety	Legal, Consumer & Public Safety	Income Support & Assistance	Information services	Housing	Information Services	Utility Assistance
Individual Family Community Support	Information Services	Individual Family Community Support	Transportation	Individual Family Community Support	Mental Health & Addiction Services	Individual Family Community Support	Legal, Consumer & Public Safety	Legal, Consumer & Public Safety	Information Services	Individual, Family, Community Support	Legal, Consumer, Public Safety
Transportation	Legal, Consumer & Public Safety	Health Care	Health Care – Food & Meals	Clothing, Personal, Household Needs	Transportation	Food & Meals – Clothing Household	Utility Assistance	Food & Meals	Food & Meals	Government & Economic Services	Income Support & Assistance

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

United Way of New York is requesting that the Legislature maintain the Governor's \$7 million investment in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library Program in the Enacted State Budget.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program is a no cost book gifting program, providing high-quality books each month to children from birth to age five, no matter their family's income. After launching in 1995, the program grew quickly, initially only distributing books to children living in Sevier County, Tennessee where Dolly grew up. However, the program was such a success that in 2000 efforts to replicate the program began nationally.

The Imagination Library partners with local affiliates who help bring the program to cities, towns, and communities. Local affiliates are responsible for enrolling children who live in their geographical areas. They also promote local programs and host events. Books are 100% free for children because local affiliates must secure funds to cover the cost of books and shipping fees.

Here in New York, there are currently eighty-six local affiliates, which include local libraries, local United Ways, school districts and community partners. The funding provided in the Executive budget will assist these local affiliates to cover the costs of mailing books and will help program expansion. Out of our 32 United Ways, we have several of them participating in the program, including our major ones.

Therefore, we are requesting the Legislature support and maintain the \$7 million investment in the SFY 25-26 Enacted budget to maintain and expand the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program.

Universal School Meals

United Way of New York is requesting that the Legislature maintain the Governor's \$376 million dollars, an increase of \$196 million to support the implementation of Universal School Meals program.

We were thrilled to see that Governor Hochul announced a historic initiative to ensure every single one of New York's over 2.7 million students can receive both breakfast and lunch for free at school. This landmark initiative builds on the Governor's affordability agenda and will help save parents money, address food insecurity among New York kids, and create more opportunities for students to succeed.

In addition, as demonstrated by increased call volume to 2-1-1 and the focus by local United Ways on food insecurity, fully funding universal school meals will help so many and will ensure that students are fed and ready for school each day.

Therefore, we request that the Legislature maintain the Governor's investment to fund Universal School Meals, providing free breakfast and lunch to all 2.7 million students across the State.

Child Care Tax Credits

The United Way of New York State is incredibly supportive of the expansion of the Empire State Child Credit. We are grateful to Governor Hochul for the initiative to deliver \$350 million in supplemental payments to low- and moderate-income families statewide through the Empire program. As UWNYS reported in our Alice report, in 2022, 40% of families with children in New York were below the ALICE Threshold. And longstanding disparities in financial hardship by household type remained: 75% of single-female-headed families and 61% of single-male-headed families were below the ALICE Threshold in 2022, compared to 24% of married-parent families. The expansion will allow more than one million families to receive this financial assistance and allow individuals to have a direct payment of up to \$330 per child.

Income Disregard Legislation

The FY 2023-24 Enacted State Budget included a one-time income disregard for individuals whose income doesn't exceed the 200% federal poverty level (FPL) and completed an approved employment program can retain full public assistance benefits for six months for purposes of mitigating a "benefits cliff." While we are in support of the Income Disregard, NYATEP and our members are concerned that the language limits the number of people participating due to the 200% FPL cap.

Therefore, we are asking that the 2025-2026 Executive Budget please remove the following language that states a recipient's total income shall not be more than 200% of the federal poverty level or increase the FPL to 400%.

We are incredibly grateful to Governor Hochul and the Legislature for your constant support for all United Way and 211's initiatives.

Thank you to the Legislature for your time, energy, and efforts for all of us and New York State.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Therese Daly", with a stylized, overlapping loop structure.

Therese Daly
President & CEO
United Way of New York State