

March 4, 2019

House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Services  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Re: HB 2650

Chair Evans and members of the committee,



I urge you to support and pass HB 2650, funding for 211info to serve Oregonians with a 24/7 contact center and accelerate its impact with regionally based Community Engagement Coordinators.

Oregon Food Bank believes that no one should be hungry and that hunger starves the human spirit. We provide food assistance to anyone who needs it through our network of regional food banks, pantries and emergency meal sites. In an average month, an estimated 260,000 people in Oregon and Clark County, Washington receive food from a pantry.

211info is a significant referral service for the food assistance network in Oregon. The second most common phone call to 211info is for food assistance. While people seeking food assistance can and do call Oregon Food Bank looking for pantry and meal sites information, 211info is the phone number we put on many of our brochures and materials. We do this because many people seeking food assistance also need help accessing other basic needs services like housing and energy assistance and 211info provides all of that information.

The requested funding—\$3.2 million for the biennium—would give everyone access to highly trained 211info specialists via phone, text and email at all hours, every day of the year. We know that many low-income Oregonians can't access information during traditional business hours because they are working. Currently, more than a third of 211info's contacts are turned away because they dial 211 outside its business hours of 8am-6pm weekdays. This is unacceptable. Expanded service hours means that every Oregonian will have access to this critical service whenever they need it.

This bill also strengthens communities by providing details on a wide range of resources. Locally based community engagement coordinators build trust and relationships in rural and underserved areas, creating a stronger resource database and facilitating cross-sector collaborations.

Oregon Food Bank values our partnership with 211info and strongly supports extending 211info's service hours to benefit residents of our communities. We urge you to fully fund 211info's funding request.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Anneliese Koehler  
Public Policy Advocate, Oregon Food Bank

oregonfoodbank.org

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