

Press Release



Contact:

Maria Stokes, United Way of the Bay Area, tel: 415-808-4264, cell: 415-320-2216
Ben Bradford, Press Assistant, Congresswoman Anna G. Eshoo, tel: 202-225-8104
Lisa Sorge, United Way Silicon Valley, tel: 408-345-4326, cell 408-431-8816

California 211 Service in Jeopardy Unless Congress Acts

U.S. Representative Anna Eshoo Urges Congressional Vote on *Calling for 211 Act*

SUNNYVALE, Calif., July 7, 2010 - U.S. Representative Anna Eshoo and United Ways of California gathered business and community leaders at a rally today to urge Congress to approve the *Calling for 211 Act* (H.R.211/S.211), which will expand the 211 information and referral service to all Americans. The bill will support expansion of 211 to the entire state of California, where service is now available in 26 of 58 counties.

Congress is heading toward the end of its 2010 session, and if the bill does not pass before this session ends, it will expire, and the country will lose its most significant opportunity to date to expand 211 coverage. The bill already has 243 bi-partisan co-sponsors in the House and 61 in the Senate, more than enough to secure approval.

“211 helps connect millions of Americans every year with an array of essential programs, from health services to housing assistance. Almost 10 years after it was designated, the 211 number only reaches two-thirds of the U.S. population and includes less than half the counties in California. I’ve authored the *Calling For 211 Act* to expand this critical service to all Americans and ensure it continues to provide a valuable lifeline for decades to come,” Rep. Eshoo said.

Eshoo was joined at the rally by San Mateo County Supervisor Adrienne Tissier, Cupertino Mayor Kris Wang, and more than 50 other 211 advocates at a UPS facility in Sunnyvale.

Peter Manzo, CEO of United Ways of California underscored the importance of the Act to expand 211 service statewide: “Without federal funding, current plans to expand 211 to the entire state of California cannot move forward. Right now, 211 is available in counties with large urban centers. Rural counties, where health and human services are more scarce, are in even greater need of 211 to connect people with help. These rural counties also lack the funding resources necessary to support 211 service.”

Carole Leigh Hutton, CEO of United Way Silicon Valley, which operates 211 Santa Clara County, said, “211 answered more than 200,000 calls in the Bay Area last year and more than 16 million nationwide. Calls to 211 have surged, up 50% since the economic crisis began. 211

-More-

Eshoo Urges Congressional Action on 211 Act – page 2 of 2

is a critical driver for economic recovery in our region - and across the nation - for Americans who need to connect with community services to help rebuild their lives. To ensure the long-term sustainability of 211, this federal funding partnership is critical. We at United Way urge Congress to take the important step of ratifying this bill before the August recess.”

Anne Wilson, CEO of United Way of the Bay Area, which operates 211 in five Bay Area counties, said, “211 is serving as a life line for struggling families during these tough times. All people, everywhere, need to be able to dial 211 – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – to get the help they need in the event of a personal crisis or a disaster. This can *only happen* if *H.R.211* passes this year. Without federal funding, expanding our 211 call centers to adequately serve growing needs will be a significant challenge.”

211 is also an important resource during disasters. When disaster strikes, 211 provides critical information about evacuation routes, food and shelter, as well as support with finding long-term recovery services. During the Bay Area’s next major earthquake, 211 will radically improve communications for residents and take pressure off overburdened 911 emergency lines.

The value of 211 during disaster is underscored by the 2007 Southern California firestorms, when 130,000 calls were answered by 211 in just 5 days. Regional 211 centers in Southern California connected people with evacuation sites, road closures, shelters, medical assistance, pet and large animal care, and more. The service also served as a vital link for individuals who were seeking to volunteer in recovery efforts.

“I’ve worked hard to make sure the bill has the votes it needs to pass. Now I’m working closely with Speaker Pelosi and Chairman Waxman of the House Energy and Commerce to bring up the bill for a vote this year, preferably prior to our August recess,” Rep. Eshoo said. “People across the country can help with this effort by calling their legislators and asserting that 211 is a priority for their communities.”

The public is encouraged to visit www.liveunited.org/211, where they can quickly identify their Congressional representatives and send an email to urge them to bring H.R.211 to a vote.

About 211

Launched throughout the Bay Area in 2008, 211 is an easy-to-remember, toll-free phone number that connects callers with local community services, such as food, shelter, counseling, employment assistance, quality child care and more. During a disaster, 211 provides critical information about evacuation routes, food and shelter, as well as support with finding new jobs and permanent housing during long-term recovery. 211 is confidential and available 24 hours a day in more than 150 languages. 211 Bay Area is operated by United Way of the Bay Area, United Way Silicon Valley, United Way of the Wine Country, Eden I&R, and Contra Costa Crisis Center. 211 is available in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, Solano and Sonoma Counties. 211 San Mateo service is scheduled to launch in Fall 2010. For more information, visit www.211BayArea.org.

#