
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 1026 Session of
2005

INTRODUCED BY PRESTON, BENNINGHOFF, DeWEESE, BUXTON,
CALTAGIRONE, CURRY, DeLUCA, DIGIROLAMO, FABRIZIO, FRANKEL,
GOODMAN, HARHAI, JOSEPHS, MANN, McILHATTAN, MELIO, PALLONE,
PETRARCA, PISTELLA, READSHAW, REED, RUFFING, SATHER, SOLOBAY,
STABACK, TANGRETTI, THOMAS, TIGUE, WALKO, WHEATLEY,
WOJNAROSKI, WRIGHT AND YOUNGBLOOD, MARCH 21, 2005

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,
MARCH 21, 2005

AN ACT

1 Providing funding for standards and for implementation of a 211
2 abbreviated dialing code for information and human services
3 referral telephone service; establishing the 211 Commission;
4 and making an appropriation.

5 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
6 hereby enacts as follows:

7 Section 1. Short title.

8 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Pennsylvania
9 211 Telephone Service Implementation Act.

10 Section 2. Legislative findings.

11 The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:

12 (1) The dialing code 211 is the national abbreviated
13 dialing code approved by the Federal Communications
14 Commission for access to health and human services
15 information and referral. The dialing code 211 is a
16 universally recognizable number that makes it easier to

1 connect individuals and families in need with the appropriate
2 community-based organizations and government agencies.

3 (2) The dialing code 211 proved its value in several
4 states during the recent disasters related to terrorist
5 attacks on September 11, 2001. In Atlanta, 211 handled over
6 14,000 calls in the week following the attacks. More than
7 5,000 people offered help and 9,000 people requested
8 assistance.

9 (3) In Connecticut, various state agencies and nonprofit
10 groups used 211 to coordinate services during the attacks.
11 Connecticut calls to 211 involved families looking for
12 victims, frightened children and concerned parents,
13 individuals reliving other disasters, people who escaped the
14 World Trade Center and were experiencing guilt, information
15 on terrorist suspects, mentally ill persons feeling
16 overwhelmed with disaster, location of vigils and requests.

17 (4) Recent hurricanes in Florida showed the strength of
18 211 when there was an increase in calls of over 100% during
19 and immediately after the hurricanes throughout that state.
20 Some 211s in affected areas were showing increases of over
21 500%. The easy-to-remember number helped relieve some of the
22 911 burden in those areas for support groups.

23 (5) The dialing code 211 helps to better address long-
24 term needs of victims and their families of the September 11,
25 2001, attacks and other types of disasters.

26 (6) A study by the National Center on Addiction and
27 Substance Abuse at Columbia University and 13 states,
28 including Pennsylvania, have detected an increased demand for
29 alcohol and drug treatment since September 11, 2001.

30 (7) Research demonstrates that exposure to trauma puts

1 an individual at four-to-five times greater risk of substance
2 abuse and stress is considered the most common cause of
3 relapse to addiction to or abuse of alcohol, drugs and
4 smoking.

5 (8) Oklahoma experienced a dramatic increase in the need
6 for treatment services in the two years following the
7 domestic terrorist bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal
8 Building on April 19, 1995. One year after the bombing, three
9 times as many residents of Oklahoma City reported increased
10 drinking. Rescue workers in Oklahoma City experienced
11 elevated rates of substance abuse, depression and suicide.

12 (9) The New York State Office of Alcoholism and
13 Substance Abuse Services reports that demand for alcohol and
14 drug treatment in New York City increased after the September
15 11, 2001, attacks.

16 (10) North Carolina, in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd
17 during September 1999, decided to embrace the dialing code
18 211 to increase people's access to health and human services.
19 Currently operational in the four largest metropolitan areas
20 of North Carolina, 211 is successfully providing quality
21 health and human service information and referral to those in
22 need.

23 (11) Over 40 states in this nation and Canada have
24 implemented or are working to implement 211 in their
25 respective jurisdictions.

26 (12) Many community groups also are viewing 211 as a
27 powerful neutral connecting point and 211 has provided help
28 to diverse populations, such as runaway children, senior
29 citizens and parents looking for child care.

30 (13) A cost benefit analysis just released written by

1 the University of Texas commissioned by the United Way of
2 America shows a clear net benefit for 211 showing that every
3 dollar invested by government or charities ends with a
4 concrete benefit of over \$1.35 plus many intangibles that
5 could not be quantified provided there is a statewide system
6 rather than a decentralized one.

7 Section 3. Definitions.

8 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall
9 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
10 context clearly indicates otherwise:

11 "211." An abbreviated dialing code approved by the Federal
12 Communications Commission for access to health and human
13 services information and referral.

14 "AIRS." The Alliance of Information and Referral Service.

15 "Applicant." A provider of information and referral services
16 that assists individuals in need of health and human services to
17 obtain assistance from appropriate providers of such services.

18 "Commission." The 211 Commission established by this act.

19 "Department." The Department of Public Welfare of the
20 Commonwealth.

21 "Governmental units." The term shall include all cities,
22 regardless of their class, counties, municipalities, townships,
23 boroughs or other political subdivisions.

24 "Human Service Answering Point." The agency-approved first
25 point at which calls for health and human services assistance
26 from individuals are answered, operated 24 hours a day.

27 "Public agency." The Commonwealth or a political
28 subdivision, public authority, municipal authority or any
29 organization located in whole or in part within this
30 Commonwealth which provides or has the authority to provide

1 human services.

2 Section 4. Duties of department.

3 The department shall approve grants to applicants that
4 satisfy the eligibility requirements of this act. The grants
5 shall be used to implement and administer 211 service to the
6 citizens of this Commonwealth.

7 Section 5. Eligibility requirements.

8 An applicant shall do all of the following:

9 (1) Agree to follow any policies, procedures or
10 standards developed by the 211 Commission.

11 (2) Ensure the provision of 24-hour coverage, year-round
12 telephone information and referral service.

13 (3) Provide a written plan that details procedures to
14 assure appropriate anonymity and confidentiality for 211
15 callers and data.

16 (4) Agree to be a part of a networked Statewide system.

17 (5) Demonstrate that the following are being met within
18 one year of funding:

19 (i) Ascribe to the AIRS or National Standards for
20 Information and Referral.

21 (ii) Have software capable of tracking call volume,
22 number of abandoned calls, average speed of answering and
23 average call length.

24 (iii) Demonstrate how they publicize 211 services
25 and educate the public on an ongoing basis.

26 (iv) Provide direct access to the deaf to the 211
27 number and multilingual accessibility either onsite or
28 access to live translation.

29 (v) Have written policies and procedures in place as
30 well as necessary software to manage donations and

1 volunteers or written agreements with another agency that
2 provides these services for them.

3 Section 6. Subcontractors.

4 A 211 provider may subcontract for a specific service. It
5 shall be the 211 provider's responsibility to insure through the
6 contract that the subcontractor follows all applicable
7 standards.

8 Section 7. Request for proposals.

9 The department shall issue grants through a request for
10 proposal process. No grant from this appropriation may exceed
11 60% of total implementation cost.

12 Section 8. 211 Commission.

13 (a) Establishment.--The 211 Commission is hereby
14 established.

15 (b) Membership.--Members of the commission shall be
16 appointed by the Governor. The commission shall have at least 12
17 members and be composed of critical stakeholders, including
18 business, law enforcement, private sector benefactors, local
19 government, Statewide and local charities and information and
20 referral experts.

21 (c) Collaboration.--The duties of the commission are as
22 follows:

23 (1) Develop standards for call wait times and call
24 abandonment rates.

25 (2) Develop database standards to include how often
26 entries are updated.

27 (3) Develop follow-up standards to include what
28 percentage of callers will be queried within two weeks of a
29 call and determine what percentage of callers will be given a
30 satisfaction survey immediately upon finishing a call.

1 (4) Develop reporting standards so reports are uniform
2 from all 211s.

3 (5) Insure that the contracting process covers the
4 entire State, so that every citizen can reach 211 through
5 their landline phone within the first year.

6 (6) Work toward cell phone coverage so that every
7 citizen can reach 211 through their cell phone.

8 (7) Develop networking standards so that when a caller
9 waits beyond an acceptable time period the call will be
10 transferred to another 211 center.

11 (8) If any center is unable to provide 211 services,
12 guarantee that a seamless system will be in place to take
13 those calls, regardless of whether the interruption was an
14 emergency or planned.

15 (9) Work in collaboration with the Department of Aging,
16 the Department of Health, the Department of Community and
17 Economic Development, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management
18 Agency, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission and the
19 Pennsylvania State Police.

20 (d) Duties.--The commission shall:

21 (1) Adopt and oversee a plan to implement the standards
22 in section 5 (relating to eligibility requirements) and
23 develop any standards, policies or procedures necessary to
24 run a Statewide networked 211 system.

25 (2) Assure that funding is linked to standards.

26 (3) Provide necessary technical assistance.

27 (4) Assist in the establishment of a long-range plan to
28 assure that every Pennsylvanian has access to 211 within the
29 first year of enactment of this act.

30 (e) Staffing.--The department shall provide adequate staff

1 to assist the commission with its duties.

2 Section 9. Appropriation.

3 The sum of \$10,000,000 is hereby appropriated to the
4 Department of Public Welfare for the purpose of administering
5 this act.

6 Section 10. Public disclosure and confidentiality of
7 information.

8 (a) Annual report of the commission.--The annual report of
9 the commission shall be a public document.

10 (b) Prohibition against release of information.--Neither the
11 public agency, nor any employee, agent or representative of a
12 Human Service Answering Point or public agency shall divulge any
13 information acquired with respect to any 211 service, its
14 customers, revenues or expenses, trade secrets, commercial
15 information and such other proprietary information while acting
16 or claiming to act as such employee, agent or representative,
17 and all such information is hereby required to be kept
18 confidential except that aggregations of information which do
19 not identify or effectively identify numbers of customers,
20 revenues or expenses, trade secrets, commercial information and
21 such other proprietary information attributable to any 211
22 services provider may be made public.

23 Section 11. Immunity.

24 (a) Generally.--No 211 services provider or its officers,
25 directors, employees, agents or vendors shall be liable to any
26 person for civil damages resulting from or caused by such
27 providers', its officers', directors', employees', agents' or
28 suppliers' participation in or acts, failures or omissions in
29 connection with that participation in the development, design,
30 installation, operation, maintenance, performance or provision

1 211 service, except for willful or wanton misconduct.

2 (b) Release of information.--No 211 provider or its
3 employees or agents shall be liable to any person for releasing
4 customer information to the agency or to any 211 system, public
5 agency or Human Service Answering Point as required by this act.

6 (c) Local governmental immunity.--All 211 systems shall be
7 local agencies who shall enjoy local governmental immunity as
8 provided under 42 Pa.C.S. Ch. 85 Subch. C (relating to actions
9 against local parties).

10 Section 12. Effective date.

11 This act shall take effect immediately.