
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 2671 Session of
2002

INTRODUCED BY O'BRIEN, ALLEN, BASTIAN, BEBKO-JONES, BELFANTI,
BISHOP, BROOKS, CALTAGIRONE, CAPPELLI, CLARK, COY, CREIGHTON,
CRUZ, CURRY, DALEY, DALLY, DeWEESE, FAIRCHILD, GEORGE,
GRUCELA, HARHAI, HARPER, HENNESSEY, HERMAN, HERSHEY, HORSEY,
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MELIO, R. MILLER, PETRARCA, PICKETT, PISTELLA, ROBINSON,
ROHRER, SAINATO, SANTONI, SATHER, SAYLOR, SHANER, SOLOBAY,
STABACK, STRITTMATTER, STURLA, SURRA, E. Z. TAYLOR,
J. TAYLOR, WALKO, WANSACZ, WASHINGTON, WATSON, WILT,
G. WRIGHT AND YOUNGBLOOD, JUNE 3, 2002

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, JUNE 3, 2002

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 Pennsylvania 211
4 Advisory Committee; 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 that:

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

1 information and referral. The dialing code 211 is a
2 universally recognizable number that makes it easier to
3 connect individuals and families in need with the appropriate
4 community-based organizations and government agencies.

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

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

20 (4) The dialing code 211 helps to better address long-
21 term needs of victims and their families of the September 11,
22 2001, attacks and other types of disasters.

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

27 (6) Research demonstrates that exposure to trauma puts
28 an individual at four to five times greater risk of substance
29 abuse and stress is considered the most common cause of
30 relapse to alcohol and drug abuse, and addiction and smoking.

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

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

12 (9) North Carolina, in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd
13 during September 1999, decided to embrace the dialing code
14 211 to increase people's access to health and human services.
15 Currently operational in the four largest metropolitan areas
16 of North Carolina, 211 is successfully providing quality
17 health and human service information and referral to those in
18 need.

19 (10) Over 40 states in this nation and Canada have
20 implemented or are working to implement 211 in their
21 respective jurisdictions.

22 (11) Many community groups also are viewing 211 as a
23 powerful neutral connecting point and 211 has provided help
24 to diverse populations, such as runaway children, senior
25 citizens and parents looking for child care.

26 Section 3. Definitions.

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

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

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

4 "Committee." The Pennsylvania 211 Advisory Committee
5 established by this act.

6 "Department." The Department of Public Welfare of the
7 Commonwealth.

8 "211." An abbreviated dialing code approved by the Federal
9 Communications Commission for access to health and human
10 services information and referral.

11 Section 4. Duties of department.

12 The department shall approve grants to applicants that
13 satisfy the eligibility requirements of this act. The grants
14 shall be used to implement and administer 211 service to the
15 citizens of this Commonwealth.

16 Section 5. Eligibility requirements.

17 An applicant shall:

18 (1) Ensure the provision of 24-hour coverage, year-round
19 telephone information and referral service.

20 (2) Provide a written plan that details procedures to
21 assure appropriate anonymity and confidentiality for 211
22 callers and data.

23 (3) Submit a written plan to meet the following
24 standards within three years of the effective date of this
25 act:

26 (i) Ascribe to the AIRS or national Standards for
27 Information and Referral.

28 (ii) Have a plan in place to become or be accredited
29 by AIRS or national Standards for Information and
30 Referral.

(iii) Utilize certified information and referral specialists and resource specialists.

(iv) Demonstrate cooperative relationships with specialized information and referral providers, crisis centers, 911 and 311 providers, where applicable.

(v) Have means of tracking call volume, number of abandoned calls, average speed of answering and average call length.

(vi) Have computerized information and referral database with client collection capability.

(vii) Use the AIRS/InfoLine taxonomy.

(viii) Have the ability to publicize 211 services and educate the public on an ongoing basis.

(ix) Provide TTY and multilingual accessibility either onsite or access to live translation.

(x) Have the ability to develop linkages through protocol with appropriate clearinghouse agencies that may be able to provide services such as volunteer or donation management.

(xi) Ensure quality of service and inquirer satisfaction through appropriate follow up.

Section 6. Areas with multiple providers.

Within any region of this Commonwealth where more than one information and referral provider will offer 211 services, the department shall require 211 centers to have a written plan to provide the following:

(1) An agreed-upon plan to work in tandem to ensure 211 service to all areas of this Commonwealth or region.

(2) Ability to share resource data information.

(3) Ability to track and share information on client

needs and unmet needs.

(4) A common means of measuring outcomes for the operation of a call center.

(5) An agreed-upon means of communicating with the community represented by the call center on requests for assistance, perceived gaps and barriers to service.

Section 7. Request for proposals.

The department shall issue grants through a request for proposal process administered by the department.

Section 8. Pennsylvania 211 Advisory Committee.

(a) Establishment.--The Pennsylvania 211 Advisory Committee is hereby established.

(b) Membership.--Members of the committee shall be appointed by the Governor. The committee shall have at least 12 members and be composed of critical stakeholders, including business, law enforcement, private sector benefactors, local government, Statewide nonprofits and information and referral experts.

(c) Collaboration.--The duties of the committee may occur by coordinating existing Commonwealth resources. The committee shall work in collaboration with the Department of Aging, the Department of Health, the Department of Community and Economic Development, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission and the Pennsylvania State Police.

(d) Duties.--The committee shall:

(1) Adopt and oversee a plan to implement standards in sections 5 and 6.

(2) Assume that funding is linked to standards and provides for a local funding component.

(3) Provide necessary technical assistance.

1 (4) Assist in the establishment of a long-range plan to
2 assure that every Pennsylvanian has access to 211.

3 (e) Staffing.--The Department of Public Welfare shall
4 provide adequate staff to assist the committee with its duties.

5 Section 9. Appropriation.

6 The sum of \$10,000,000 is hereby appropriated to the
7 Department of Public Welfare for the purpose of administering
8 this act.

9 Section 10. Effective date.

10 This act shall take effect immediately.