



**Testimony for Joint Meeting of House Human Services and Senate Health and Welfare
Committees, October 9, 2026**

**Vermont 211 — Implementation of Act 143 and the VT Homeless Response Continuum
(VHRC)**

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Good afternoon, my name is Alison Lamagna, and I'm the Executive Director at United Ways of VT / Vermont 211. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

For more than 20 years, Vermont 211 has been the front door to health and human services for Vermonters — a free, confidential service staffed by trained Community Resource Specialists who help people navigate some of the most difficult moments in their lives. We operate 8am-10pm, 7 days/week, 365 days/year.

As many of you are aware, VT 211 helps Vermonters navigate complex systems and services to address crises before they turn to emergencies. This safeguards the integrity of our 911 system and serves as a safety net for people in vulnerable times. Vermonters have also received a clear, straightforward message: call 211 when you need help or simply don't know where else to turn. One of the defining strengths of 211 is that it is a simple, three-digit number people can remember when they are overwhelmed, in crisis, or don't have paperwork or other resources in front of them. In the 21 years we have been in operation, we have risen to meet community needs as a critical state partner time and again - during times of disaster, when federal policy changes impact our communities, during cold weather emergencies, and more. We are experts at what we do; we are a nationally accredited 211 service and our staff are certified by the national accrediting body, and we have the knowledge and backing of an entire network of 211s across the US and Canada. In a nutshell, 211 is an asset for the State of VT and we possess the infrastructure and systems that are built to handle community referrals. Housing continues to be the greatest request and referral we provide to community members, whether for shelters, the Emergency Cold Weather Shelter Program or rental assistance.

Since 2010, VT 211 has supported the State's GA Housing Program. We serve as a stopgap and safety net for callers experiencing homelessness with urgent safety needs that arise outside of the State's business hours, without interfering with the State's full process and



procedures. Prior to September 1, 2026, VT 211 followed ESD's eligibility rules to provide intake and placement in motels for eligible Vermonters on evenings, weekends and holidays - temporarily until the next business day when callers were required to contact ESD.

In July and August of 2026, we completed 1,065 such intakes and issued 212 temporary vouchers. This included 118 individuals with disabilities and 60 families. Being without shelter for these individuals and families is an emergency.

With the rollout of the new Act 143 Vermont Homeless Response Continuum on September 1, 2026, we were surprised to learn that VT 211 was being removed as an access point and after-hours safety net, without prior warning that this change would occur. This means individuals can only access the program during business hours, and we have seen that this has put pressure on providers who are stretched thin and caused dangerous delays with cold weather approaching.

Since 9/1, we have received more than 300 calls from individuals seeking to access this program or resolve issues that are left over from their daytime attempts to access the program or resolve issues with their motel placements. Of course, this doesn't account for all the callers that our overburdened community partners are assisting. The callers to 211 are the folks that are most susceptible to falling through the cracks, since they are likely not connected with other service providers and case managers who are assisting them. For example, in the last week, there have been two individuals who called 211 because they were approved for vouchers during the day, after following the required steps, and their voucher was either never sent to the hotel before the end of the business day, or they were disconnected from the call before the full process was completed. One individual was disabled. One called on a Friday night and would have slept outside all weekend if 211 staff had not been able to call the motel and advocate for them to accept the client despite the voucher not being sent. 211 is an asset with the established infrastructure, systems, and expertise that can be leveraged as part of the whole system to alleviate the burden on community providers and unhoused individuals.

We have many partner United Way organizations across Vermont that have been receiving feedback from their local community partners on the impacts that they have felt and witnessed from the implementation of Act 143 that they asked us to represent here today.

As often happens when there are gaps, nonprofits come together to try to address needs. VT 211 is partnering with Speranza Inn and Downstreet to create a safety net for the most



vulnerable and critical folks in the central VT area as the weather gets dangerously cold - those with critical medical conditions or disabilities, or families with children. Folks can be placed for one night and will receive case management and other services with a plan for the following day. It is important to note that this is an extremely limited option with only 10 possible rooms, many of which are full. So, we do not see this as a solution to the issues and concerns I have described here; we see it as a limited life-saving measure.

All of this illustrates our simple call to action: we ask that VT 211 is reinstated as the after-hours stopgap for the VHRC program. This will not override the new rules, the law, or the Department's decision-making capability. We are eager to work together as partners to leverage our infrastructure and expertise and help the system work efficiently and effectively as legislators intended.