

BEFORE THE NEBRASKA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Commission,	)	Application No. C-3221/
on its own motion, seeking	)	PI-81
comment on the request by United	)	
Way of the Midlands to be	)	
assigned the use of "211" in	)	
Dawson, Phelps, Kearney, Harlan,	)	GRANTED
Franklin, Buffalo and Gosper	)	
Counties for access to First	)	
Call for Help (FCFH), a	)	
comprehensive information and	)	
referral service.	)	Entered: September 21, 2004

BY THE COMMISSION:

On June 22, 2004, the Commission opened a docket to consider the request by United Way of the Midlands for use of "211" as the dialing code for First Call for Help (FCFH) services in Dawson, Phelps, Kearney, Harlan, Franklin, Buffalo and Gosper Counties. The Commission previously assigned "211" to United Way of the Midlands in Application Nos. C-2621/PI-53, entered on February 20, 2002; C-2732, entered on July 23, 2002; C-3061/PI-75, entered on February 10, 2004; C-3066/PI-76, entered on February 10, 2004; and C-3099/PI-77, entered on March 30, 2004, for use in numerous counties throughout the state.

A hearing on the matter was held on August 18, 2004, at 10:30 a.m. at the Kearney Public Library in Kearney, Nebraska, with a video link to the Commission Library in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Comments were filed with the Commission by the Dawson County Emergency Management Agency on July 14, 2004; the Mayor of the City of Cozad on July 19, 2004; the Administrator of the Tri-County Hospital District on July 21, 2004; and the Dawson County Sheriff on July 21, 2004. On August 16, 2004, the United Way of the Kearney Area filed with the Commission, letters of support from the City Manager for the City of Kearney, the Director of Buffalo County Emergency Management, the Executive Director of the Ft. Kearney Chapter of the American Red Cross, Community Action Partnership of Mid-Nebraska, the Chief of Police for the City of Kearney, the Salvation Army Corps Commanding Officer for Kearney, Good Beginnings in Franklin County, and the Buffalo County Sheriff. On the same date the United Way of the Kearney Areas submitted resolutions from the Boards of County Supervisors for Kearney County, Harlan County and Phelps County in support of its application.

Jamie Moore, vice president of Volunteer and Community Services for United Way of the Midlands testified that "211"

service will provide increased public access to Health and Human Services in the above-listed counties. Callers to "211" will reach trained and certified information referral specialists who will provide information and referrals to an appropriate service provider in their area including governmental agencies, non-profit groups or faith-based organizations. Referral specialists are available seven-days-a-week and 24-hours-per-day. Callers also have access to translators fluent in 10 to 12 languages. Currently, "211" is staffed by six full-time staff, three part-time staff and a long-term volunteer. She further testified that "211" works cooperatively with local emergency management agencies and "911" call centers. In the event of a major disaster, "211" will move to the EOC and manage communications for emergency management and "211" has the ability to connect to several sites.

Ms. Moore further testified that as of July 1, 2004, 60 percent of Nebraska's population has access to services by dialing "211." United Way is currently in discussions to bring the service to 39 additional counties. Nationally, 134 call centers are located throughout 26 states and approximately 32 percent of the nation's population has access to "211" services. Six states have statewide systems, including Hawaii, Idaho, North Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota and Connecticut. Ms. Moore also testified that as of the first quarter of 2004, United Way had received 10,863 calls, an increase of 22 percent over the first half of 2003 to 2004.

Marsha Wilkerson, Assistant Director for United Way of the Kearney area, also testified in support of the application. Ms. Wilkerson testified that First Call for Help in the Kearney area took more than 2,500 calls from individuals needing services and information. However, she testified that people frequently ask for the phone number for First Call for Help. She testified that "211" would be a natural extension of the existing information and referral service and the easy-to-remember number will provide better access for people needing services or information. They have formed public and private partnerships with Two Rivers Public Health Department and other non-profit organizations such as the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Good Beginnings in Franklin County, the Community Action Partnership of Mid-Nebraska and the Tri-Cities Medical Response System. She further provided letters of support from multiple organizations.

Also testifying in support of the application, was Terri Krohn, director of Two Rivers Public Health Department which serves seven counties in south-central Nebraska. Ms. Krohn testified that the Board has voted to provide funding for "211"

for two years and believes that the service will assist them in better serving the 92,000 individuals in their area.

Further testimony in support of the application was provided by Therese Swanson from Lexington United Way in Dawson County; Barbara Fink, Director of Cozad United Way; Jan Hoyt, Director of First Call for Help for the Kearney area of the United Way; and Pat Munro, Executive Director of the United Way.

Richard Pierce, Chairman of the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors, testified regarding the Board's concerns that the public may confuse "211" services with "911" services; that individuals using the service may assume that they are talking to a governmental agency; and the need for well defined procedures for handling calls from individuals who may be a danger to themselves or others. He further testified that the project must be sustainable so that local municipalities are not required to provide financial support and that plans must be in place to provide "211" service in times of natural or man-made disaster that would render the access line to Omaha unavailable. Mr. Pierce further testified that the Board recognized the valuable services provided through United Way via the "211" service.

#### O P I N I O N     A N D     F I N D I N G S

The Commission finds that use of "211" by United Way of the Midlands should be expanded to Dawson, Phelps, Kearney, Harlan, Franklin, Buffalo and Gosper Counties. As with the preceding applications, "211" calls can be routed to 866-813-1731. The contact person for United Way of the Midlands is Jamesena Grimes Moore, who can be reached at 402-522-7930.

Consistent with the original applications, it is the Commission's preliminary belief that individual carrier costs for "211" access will not be significant. If, however, a carrier seeks recovery of costs associated with routing "211" calls for expansion of "211" access to Dawson, Phelps, Kearney, Harlan, Franklin, Buffalo and Gosper Counties, the Commission requires that plans for cost recovery be submitted to the Commission for approval.

The Commission will make available suggested language for directory listings and bill inserts. Affected telephone companies must use, at minimum, the information contained in these materials to inform their customers of the availability of "211" service. Affected telephone companies include those that serve Dawson, Phelps, Kearney, Harlan, Franklin, Buffalo and Gosper Counties. The public must have easy directory access to

211 and other public interest numbers in order to maximize the benefit of such designations of scarce numbering resources. The Commission continues to strongly urge all carriers to require their directory publishing companies to display all public interest numbers such as 211, 511, 711 and 911 in a common and easily accessible location in the directory such as inside the front cover.

The Commission finds that **December 21, 2004**, should be the deadline for "211" routing for Dawson, Phelps, Kearney, Harlan, Franklin, Buffalo and Gosper Counties.

O R D E R

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED by the Nebraska Public Service Commission that "211" is hereby, designated for use by United Way of the Midlands for a referral service in Dawson, Phelps, Kearney, Harlan, Franklin, Buffalo and Gosper Counties.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that **December 21, 2004**, is the deadline set by the Commission for implementation of "211" routing for Dawson, Phelps, Kearney, Harlan, Franklin, Buffalo and Gosper Counties.

IT IS FINALLY ORDERED that carriers seeking recovery of costs associated with routing "211" calls for Dawson, Phelps, Kearney, Harlan, Franklin, Buffalo and Gosper Counties submit cost recovery plans to the Commission for approval.

MADE AND ENTERED in Lincoln, Nebraska on this 21st day of September, 2004.

NEBRASKA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

COMMISSIONERS CONCURRING:

Chairman

ATTEST:

Executive Director