

BEFORE THE TENNESSEE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

April 8, 2024

IN RE:	)	
	)	
PETITION OF EAST TENNESSEE 211 FOR 211	)	DOCKET NO.
TRANSFER OF EAST AND UPPER EAST TENNESSEE	)	23-00071
DESIGNATION FOR ANDERSON, BLOUNT,	)	
CAMPBELL, CLAIBORNE, COCKE, GRAINGER,	)	
JEFFERSON, KNOX, LOUDON, MONROE, MORGAN,	)	
ROANE, SCOTT, SEVIER, UNION, CARTER, GREENE,	)	
HANCOCK, HAWKINS, JOHNSON, SULLIVAN, UNICOL,	)	
AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES	)	

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ORDER APPROVING TRANSFER OF 211 DESIGNATION

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This matter came before Chairman Herbert H. Hilliard, Vice Chairman David F. Jones, Commissioner Kenneth C. Hill, Commissioner David Crowell, and Commissioner John Hie of the Tennessee Public Utility Commission (the “Commission” or “TPUC”), the panel assigned to this docket, during a regularly scheduled Commission Conference held on February 20, 2024 to consider the *Petition of East Tennessee 211 for 211 Transfer of East and Upper East Tennessee Designation for Anderson, Blount, Campbell, Claiborne, Cocke, Grainger, Jefferson, Knox, Loudon, Monroe, Morgan, Roane, Scott, Sevier, Union, Carter, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi, and Washington Counties* (the “*Petition*”) filed by East Tennessee 211 and United Way of Greater Knoxville (“United Way”) (collectively, the “Petitioners”) on September 19, 2023. In their *Petition*, the Petitioners seek to transfer the 211-designation held by East Tennessee 211 to United Way.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Petition*, p. 1 (September 19, 2023).

## **BACKGROUND AND PETITION**

On July 31, 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (the “FCC”) granted a petition filed by information and referral service providers seeking nationwide assignment of an abbreviated dialing code. The FCC found that the proposal submitted by the petitioners met the “public interest” standards for assignment of N11 codes, which the FCC established in its *N11 First Report and Order*.<sup>2</sup> The FCC designated 211 as the abbreviated dialing code for access to community information and referral services as an effort to transition citizens’ non-life-threatening calls to 211 rather than utilizing emergency 911. The FCC specifically found in the *Third Report and Order*:

Individuals facing serious threats to life, health, and mental well-being have urgent and critical human needs that are not addressed by dialing 911 for emergency assistance or 311 for non-emergency police assistance...We believe that the Information and Referral Petitioners have shown a public need exists for an easy to use, easy to remember N11 code to efficiently bring community information and referral services to those who need them, providing a national safety network for persons to get access readily to assistance. Therefore, we find that the public interest standard has been met.<sup>3</sup>

Since the FCC’s designation of 211 codes for referral services, this Commission, in accordance with federal guidelines, orders, and rules, has designated 211 codes for numerous entities desiring to accept and route 211 calls to appropriate agencies for assistance, which includes, but is not limited to, providing telephone numbers/links to websites to city and county departments, hospitals, utilities, and disaster relief/shelters.

East Tennessee 211 currently answers 211 calls in Anderson, Blount, Campbell, Claiborne, Cocke, Grainger, Jefferson, Knox, Loudon, Monroe, Morgan, Roane, Scott, Sevier, Union, Carter, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi, and Washington counties.<sup>4</sup> Calls requesting information and/or referrals for the Knoxville area are routed to the Knoxville/Knox County Community Action Committee (the “CAC”) for assistance. In addition to transferring 211-

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<sup>2</sup> *First Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, 12 FCC Rcd. 5572, CC Docket No. 92-105 (1997).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at Paras. 18-19

<sup>4</sup> *Petition* pp. 2-3.

designation, the Petitioners seek to replace the CAC with the United Way for information and referral assistance.<sup>5</sup> Both CAC and United Way submitted letters in support of the *Petition*. CAC Executive Director, Barbara Kelly, states that her organization supports and is committed to a smooth transition to United Way.<sup>6</sup> Matt Ryerson, President and CEO of United Way, states that United Way will provide necessary information to citizens to make the transition successful for this region of Tennessee.<sup>7</sup>

The *Petition* affirms that United Way will continue to fund 211 and maintain sustainability, and that the change will streamline budget and operating processes. East Tennessee 211 currently provides 211 services to all twenty-three (23) counties and remains committed to providing high level service. For managerial capability, the Petitioners will retain Russ Jensen, the current Director of East Tennessee 211 and President of Inform Tennessee.<sup>8</sup>

#### **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

During the regularly scheduled Commission Conference held on February 20, 2024, upon consideration of the *Petition*, the panel found that the Petitioners have sufficiently demonstrated the technical, managerial, and financial capabilities to provide the described service. East Tennessee 211 has a twenty (20) year history of providing high quality service in answering and routing the 211 calls received at its call centers, which already handle calls for the twenty-three counties noted above. In addition, the panel found that United Way has committed to providing financial support that will benefit the operation of the 211 service. The panel concluded that the qualifications of East Tennessee 211, together with United Way's funding and commitment to provide and share data will further the work of 211, and the transition should be seamless to citizens in those counties contacting 211 to obtain information services and referrals. Therefore, based upon the agreement of the parties to this

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<sup>5</sup> *Id.* pgs. 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* pg. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* pg. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* pgs. 3-5. Mr. Jensen is an original board member of East Tennessee 211.

transfer and the financial, technical and managerial capabilities of United Way and East Tennessee 211, the panel voted unanimously to approve the *Petition*, as filed.

**IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED THAT:**

1. The *Petition of East Tennessee 211 for 211 Transfer of East and Upper East Tennessee Designation for Anderson, Blount, Campbell, Claiborne, Cocke, Grainger, Jefferson, Knox, Loudon, Monroe, Morgan, Roane, Scott, Sevier, Union, Carter, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi, and Washington Counties* filed by the Petitioners on September 19, 2023, seeking to transfer the 211–designation for the noted counties from East Tennessee 211 to the United Way of Greater Knoxville is granted.

2. Any person who is aggrieved by the Commission’s decision in this matter may file a Petition for Reconsideration with the Commission within fifteen (15) days from the date of this Order.

3. Any person who is aggrieved by the Commission’s decision in this matter has the right to judicial review by filing a Petition for Review in the Tennessee Court of Appeals, Middle Section, within sixty (60) days from the date of this Order.

**FOR THE TENNESSEE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION:**

**Chairman Herbert H. Hilliard,  
Vice Chairman David F. Jones,  
Commissioner Kenneth C. Hill,  
Commissioner David Crowell and  
Commissioner John Hie concurring.**

None dissenting.

**ATTEST:**

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Earl Taylor" with a stylized "abh" or similar mark to the right.

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**Earl R. Taylor, Executive Director**