

PRESS RELEASE

United Way Leaders Head For Capitol Hill

Staff and volunteers from Connecticut United Ways join more than 1,000 others from across the country to influence national policy

STATEWIDE — Volunteers and staff from Connecticut United Ways joined more than 1,000 others from across the nation last week to improve lives by influencing national policy that affects communities in Connecticut. Mobilized by United Way Worldwide, advocates from local United Ways visited Capitol Hill and met with their congressional delegates on March 18 to advance the common good by advocating for issues related to education, financial stability and health of families and individuals in Connecticut.

Drawing on United Way's knowledge of its communities and what works to strengthen them, Connecticut's 16 United Ways, representing hundreds of community partners and more than 115,000 donors across the state, recommended a public policy agenda that:

- supports the federal Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Grant Program;
- makes supportive housing a priority;
- maintains a commitment to quality early childhood care and education;
- invests wisely in the nation's workforce development system;
- protects existing charitable giving incentives in the federal tax code; and
- supports a vibrant 2-1-1 non-emergency dialing system for health and human services in Connecticut and across the nation.

United Way representatives are advocating for Congress to move and pass S.211/HR.211, the Calling for 2-1-1 Act, which will strengthen 2-1-1 in Connecticut and across the nation. 2-1-1 is a toll-free, 24-hour information and referral line that connects people to vital health and human services. The bill, which has 218 House cosponsors and 57 Senate cosponsors, would create a grant program to implement a nationwide 2-1-1 system and provide funding necessary to meet the needs of the community. Connecticut was the first state in the nation to provide statewide 2-1-1 service. Last year, 2-1-1 in Connecticut handled nearly 360,000 calls resulting in nearly half a million service requests for people looking for help with basic needs such as housing, utilities and food, and for help with child care needs and elder care issues, mental health supports, substance abuse counseling, and many more health and human services.

Connecticut's United Way staff and volunteers also advocated for increased support of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Grant Program. Volunteer Income Tax Assistance programs offer free tax preparation and related financial services to median and low-income individuals and families. The majority of individuals served by VITA programs have annual household earnings below \$40,000. Last year, in the Hartford area alone, the VITA campaign brought \$11.9 million back to 5,365 filers, for an average return of \$2,200. Since 2003, the use of VITA programs has increased more than 140 percent, straining even the most established and well-funded of programs. United Way staff and volunteers are advocating for an appropriation of \$35 million for the VITA Grant Program in fiscal year 2011.

United Way of Connecticut is the state association for the 16 independent United Ways in the State of Connecticut. To find your local United Way, visit <http://www.ctunitedway.org/Who/CTUWays.asp>.

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