

211 LA

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Contact: Nick Barnes-Batista, nick.barnes@berlinrosen.com, (610) 368-2175

At County Hearing, Community Leaders, Social Service Providers Speak Out Against Deloitte Takeover of 2-1-1 Hotline

Opposition grows as County seeks to turn over essential 2-1-1 services to for-profit consulting firm at center of [\\$55 million EDD disaster](#)

Board of Supervisors will consider \$100+ million contract with Deloitte on July 12

LOS ANGELES, CA — Social service providers and community leaders joined together with 211 LA staff members Wednesday to voice their opposition to Los Angeles County's preliminary decision to turn over control of the county's 2-1-1 services to Deloitte, a for-profit consulting firm with a track record of failing Californians.

During a meeting of LA County's Family and Social Services cluster Wednesday afternoon, dozens of community leaders and 211 LA staff members, across nearly three hours of testimony, spoke out against the county's proposed \$115 million contract with Deloitte, which would decrease access to essential social services for individuals and families across the county who need them most.

"Our city works closely with 211 LA on urgent issues, transfer between services, and best practices for supporting residents," **said Jeanne Holm, Deputy Mayor for Budget and Innovation for the City of Los Angeles.** "The 211 LA staff consistently go above and beyond to assist our residents to find the resources they need for very challenging situations, situations that cannot be relegated to an automated system. We rely as a city on 211 LA."

211 LA, a non-profit organization staffed by LA County residents, has operated Information & Referral services for LA County, including the 2-1-1 hotline, for over 40 years. 211 LA Community Resource Advisors (CRAs) are trained to lead personalized, holistic one-on-one conversations with people in need who reach out to 2-1-1 — a proven model that allows 211 LA to serve hundreds of thousands of LA County residents per year.

"This past week, I vouchered a single mom who was homeless with her children sleeping in her vehicle. And she cried of gratitude and I cried with her because I was so happy that I could do that for her," **said Yvonne Vasquez, a CRA at 211 LA.** "And she's not the only one - we help hundreds and hundreds of families that way."

Vasquez continued, “We understand where they’re coming from and they’re not going to get that with a computerized system. They’re just not going to get that human touch. So I urge you to please reject Deloitte’s proposal for the sake of this county.”

Deloitte’s proposed approach to 2-1-1, on the other hand, would reorient the system away from person-to-person interactions and toward technologies like chatbots and AI. This over-reliance on technology stands in stark contrast to best practices used by other 2-1-1 organizations in California, which are redoubling their commitment to a personalized, holistic approach.

“It is not technology itself we object to. It is the details of how that technology is used, the assumptions behind how it will work, and the barriers and harm it will create for the community if implemented as proposed,” **said Alana Hitchcock, a senior director at 211 LA.** “The CEO and CIO failed to introduce this technology modernization in a way that safeguards the most vulnerable and guarantees that there will be enough live support to meet the full needs of the population.”

Deloitte has a clear record of failure in taking over social services from coast to coast, repeatedly winning contracts with low bids only to [fail to provide](#) the staffing and technology necessary to meet the community needs. The consulting firm has then [turned around](#), obtained additional funding to fix the platforms and hire additional staff, and then demanded significant budget increases to continue the work.

“This has happened repeatedly across the nation on programs ranging from [vaccine distribution](#) to [employment benefits](#),” **said Sheri Bonstelle, an attorney representing 211 LA.** Deloitte cited these programs as qualifications in the RFP, but then failed to disclose any litigation, or refunded contracts as required.”

Bonstelle continued, “The County of LA claims that it ‘waived’ those requirements for Deloitte, when it accepted their proposal without the information — even when the information was presented as part of 211 LA’s protest.”

The Board of Supervisors will hold a hearing on the proposed contract with Deloitte on July 12.

Additional excerpts from the cluster hearing are below. If you’d like to learn more or interview a staff member at 211 LA, please reach out to nick.barnes@berlinrosen.com

- **Vikki Vickers, Corporation for Supportive Housing:** “211 LA is staffed by caring, knowledgeable and sensitive staff who are quick to do accurate assessments and the right identification of the proper resources for our client. We run to them for our homeless and disabled clients, for our food resources, for media resources, for employment because they are dependable. 211 LA staff are local residents familiar with the Los Angeles experience, the different cultures, the different languages, the foods, the trends, everything.”

- **Erik Sternad, Executive Director, 211 Ventura:** “Deloitte’s poor track record of public service response and their plan to heavily rely on chat bots to address urgent social needs of LA County callers is moving counter to every one of the leading 2-1-1s across the country. These 2-1-1s like in Ventura County are moving towards greater service integration, more personal human engagement to address the complex situations that 2-1-1 callers are in.”
- **Gloria Cruz, Director of Policy, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA):** “211 LA has been a trusted partner and a critical agency getting important information to immigrant Angelinos. Our organization is alarmed that this specific firm has a history of working with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE. Replacing this vital service with an entity that has a history of working with ICE will set our county backwards in all the progress we have made to gain the trust of immigrant Angelinos.”
- **Corina Post, SEIU Local 721:** Deloitte is untrustworthy. They care about profits and shareholders. They do not care about service quality or the community — they cut costs every step of the way at detriment to workers and to your constituents. The CA Call Center for unemployment run by Deloitte answered less than 1% of calls during March and April of 2020, the most critical months of the pandemic. Deloitte’s California benefits call center failed to answer 73 million calls, leaving residents to fend for themselves during the pandemic, and caused lack of payment for 300,000 Californians.
- **Richard Abrusci, 211 California:** “If awarded this contract, this would be Deloitte’s first experience with providing 211 services. Bringing a for-profit vendor in to run one of the most critical services for LA county residents, the largest county in the state, is catastrophic. The choice is clear. 211 LA is the only community partner with a proven track record to continue providing these lifesaving services. Moving in any other direction will cause irreparable damage.”
- **Maribel Marin, Executive Director, 211 LA:** “This is indeed a train wreck in the making. If you approve this contract, I’ll be sad for our employees, many of whom have worked for 211 LA for decades and are truly public servants. But I’ll really be sad for the LA County residents looking for help with their issues, whether it’s homelessness, suicidal thoughts, elder abuse, hate incidents, food vulnerabilities, or other complex issues that a chatbot can’t begin to address.”
- **John Donner, former AT&T executive and 211 LA Board Member:** “I was deeply perplexed and disappointed when I became aware of the RFP that the County released because it seemed to place an over-reliance on technology in connecting people to the services they need...These kinds of services can only be done by highly-trained human beings such as the CRAs employed by 211 LA.”

- **Valerie Lynne Shaw, 211 LA Board Member:** “Today, you’re being asked to move forward with a new contract that will be implemented by a for-profit corporation. Now the mission of a corporation is to get money. And our goal really is to serve people. I ask this panel to ask yourselves: do you really believe that this disconnected corporation is equipped to serve LA County?”
- **Linda Wah, community advocate and 211 LA Board Member:** “What if, instead of going in this wrong direction, LA County actually invested in its 2-1-1 services? What if, instead of trying to use the mirage of “technology” to squeeze its 2-1-1 provider, it invested just a few more dollars so that 211 LA could do the job it was designed to do?”
- **Amy Latzer, Chief Operations Officer, 211 LA:** “211 LA has been a trusted partner for over 40 years and is deeply entrenched in the community and with service partners who rely on us to always be there and deliver quality service. We are all in, and always have been. When emergencies and disasters strike, we are there to answer the call.”
- **Robert Liljenwall, 211 LA Board member:** “I am here today to tell you that you are taking the heart out of 211 if you move forward a recommendation to replace 211 LA with a corporate, profit motivated company that has no experience and no business stepping into a role of serving as the front line of service to our most vulnerable populations.”

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