

**PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

**Communications Division  
Consumer Programs Branch**

**RESOLUTION T-17218  
December 17, 2009**

**R E S O L U T I O N**

Resolution T-17218. Volunteer Center of Sonoma County. Request for certification as the 2-1-1 service provider for Mendocino County. By Letter to Executive Director filed on October 12, 2009.

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**Summary**

This resolution grants Volunteer Center of Sonoma County hereinafter referred to as Volunteer Center, the authority to use the 2-1-1 abbreviated dialing code to provide information and referral (I&R) services to all of Mendocino County. This authority is granted for an indefinite term, and is subject to review upon a letter to the Commission showing sufficient grounds to revise or rescind the term.

**Background**

2-1-1 is the national abbreviated dialing code designated by the Federal Communications Commission to be used to phone non-emergency community I&R providers. Upon dialing 2-1-1, a caller will be routed to a referral service and then to an agency that can provide information concerning social services such as housing assistance, programs to assist with utility bills, food assistance and other less urgent situations not currently addressed by either 911 or 311 services. On January 23, 2002, the California Public Utilities Commission (Commission) instituted Rulemaking (R.) 02-01-025 into the implementation of 2-1-1 dialing in the State of California. In Decision (D.) 03-02-029, the Commission adopted regulatory policies and procedures to implement 2-1-1 dialing.

Included among these policies were guidelines and procedures whereby the Commission can certify I&R providers as eligible to purchase network telephone service that will enable them to receive calls from those who dial 2-1-1. Most of the procedures for I&R providers to follow in requesting authority to use the 2-1-1 dialing code are contained in D.03-02-029's Ordering Paragraph 2, quoted below:

2. Information and Referral (I&R) providers seeking authority to provide 2-1-1 service or to establish Regional Technical Centers for routing 2-1-1 calls to I&R service providers in California shall submit a letter to the Executive Director of the Commission approximately nine months before they plan to commence service. The letter shall contain the information detailed in the Service Provider Application Package in Appendix A, shall include a service rollout plan, and shall demonstrate compliance with the guidelines contained in Appendix A to this decision, along with letters of endorsement from community groups as described in Appendix A. The I&R providers shall serve this application letter on the parties to this proceeding on the same day as its submission to the Commission. The Commission shall publish a notice of this letter in its Daily Calendar. We establish a milestone of six months from the initial filing of this application letter for action by the Commission via a resolution resolving any issues. This application letter should be served on the appropriate incumbent local exchange carriers and on all parties to this proceeding.

Volunteer Center filed a complete copy of its application letter<sup>1</sup> requesting certification as the 2-1-1 service provider in Mendocino County, as well as a copy with information Volunteer Center considered confidential redacted, that was received by the Commission's Executive Director on October 12, 2009. On the same date, Volunteer Center sent to the service list for R.02-01-025 redacted copies of its application letter.

We remind local exchange carriers of D. 03-02-029, Ordering Paragraph 3, which states "Within four months of the filing of a letter by I&R providers or a regional technical center seeking to initiate 2-1-1 service, the incumbent local exchange carriers serving the territory over which the 2-1-1 service will be offered shall file advice letters to provide the 2-1-1 switch translation services required. Ordering Paragraph 4 states "All other incumbent local carriers serving a territory over which the 2-1-1 service will be offered shall provide the needed switch translation service, but may either concur in the price terms offered by Pacific or Verizon or submit their own cost support information. This filing shall follow that of Pacific or Verizon by no more than 30 days." Competitive local carriers must comply with Ordering Paragraph 7, which states in part, "Within one month of the filing of an advice letter by incumbent local exchange carriers to offer 2-1-1 switch translation services in a specific area, each competitive local carrier providing services in the affected areas shall submit an advice letter, under General

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<sup>1</sup> The terms "application letter", "letter" and "application" used herein mean the package of materials the prospective I&R provider files with the Commission by letter to the Executive Director, as specified in D.03-02-029, and are not a formal application to the Commission as described in the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure.

Order 96-A<sup>2</sup>, demonstrating that it will offer 2-1-1 switch translation service at a reasonable rate to I&R providers on a timetable consistent with their rollout plans.”

We remind payphone service providers of the same decision’s Ordering Paragraph 6, stating in part “The providers of payphone services in an area in which 2-1-1 service will be offered shall end all non-conforming uses of 2-1-1 service within six months of their filing.” i.e., within six months of the filing of the application letter by the I&R provider.

### **Notice/Protests**

Volunteer Center states that it mailed a copy of its application letter to SBC Communications now AT&T as well as to the service list for R.02-01-025, which includes the appropriate incumbent local exchange carriers. The Communications Division published notice of Volunteer Center application letter in the Commission Daily Calendar on October 15 through October 21, 2009. In response to Volunteer Center application letter, the California Alliance of Information and Referral Services, Inc. (CAIRS) submitted a letter dated November 11, 2009 supporting the request of Volunteer Center to use the 2-1-1 dialing code in Mendocino County. No other comments were submitted.

### **Discussion**

The 2-1-1 application process prescribed by D.03-02-029 for potential I&R providers is divided into four major sections. The first section elicits information on the I&R provider’s organization, structure, background, and experience.

Volunteer Center is a non profit organization incorporated in the State of California. The documents included to support this categorization are its articles of incorporation, including by-laws, and letters from the Internal Revenue Service. Volunteer Center is located at 153 Stony Circle, Suite 100, Santa Rosa, Ca 95401. The contact person is Eunice Valentine, Executive Director at 707 573 3399, evalentine@volunteernow.org.

The Volunteer Center of Sonoma County began 37 years ago to recruit and then refer volunteers to placements at community-based agencies. The mission of the volunteer Center is: to promote volunteerism and strengthen community service efforts. In fulfillment of its mission, the Volunteer Center has assumed a leadership role in partnering with agencies and local government to operate programs such as Sonoma County’s comprehensive, countywide Information and Referral Service, Volunteer Wheels, Court Mandated Community Service and the Resource Center for Nonprofits.

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<sup>2</sup> General Order 96-A has since been replaced by General Order 96-B.

For 16 years, the Volunteer Center operated a successful Information and Referral (I&R) program specifically designed to address the issues of individuals and families in extreme need. Over 16,500 clients were served annually. The I&R program was supported through partnerships with the entire nonprofit community and especially through a unique partnership with the county of Sonoma Human Services Department. The I&R program is located within the Human Service Department at a public assistance intake center. This location affords easy access to the target population offering vital information and referral services with face-to-face contact, in addition to access via telephone and e-mail. The program maintains an immediate needs pantry, stocked with basic food and personal hygiene items to help in emergency transition periods.

Since February 11, 2009, the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County along with the County of Sonoma, The Community Foundation of Sonoma and United Way of the Wine Country have successfully partnered in Sonoma 2-1-1. The county provides office space and equipment, and employs a social worker who is a member of the 2-1-1 staff team. The Volunteer Center of Sonoma County employs a program director, a call specialist/volunteer coordinator and a certified resource specialist, who comprise the core of the 2-1-1 staff, all based at the county facility. The Volunteer Center also offers volunteer/internship opportunities for social work, psychology and sociology majors from nearby Santa Rosa Junior college and Sonoma State University. The use of interns, many of whom are bi-lingual, allows maximum leverage of the agencies assets in addition to developing program ambassadors in the community. The United Way of the Wine Country provides fundraising, marketing and advocacy work for the 2-1-1 program.

The Volunteer Center is a member of AIRS and CAIRS, two professional information and referral associations dedicated to the advancement of this work. The Sonoma 2-1-1 call center is working towards full AIRS accreditation prior to year 2010.

Since 2008, the 2-1-1 Mendocino Steering Committee, formed by Mendocino County, has been exploring the most effective, efficient and sustainable means of implementing 2-1-1 in Mendocino County. The 2-1-1 Mendocino County Steering Committee has been driven by the county's Health and Human Services Director, First Five Mendocino and United Way of the Wine Country. Local service providers and community leaders have been included in the planning process with meetings, forums and printed updates. When the expanded Steering Committee looked for successful 2-1-1 providers, the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County was invited to participate in meetings and share their 2-1-1 program model.

The 2-1-1 Mendocino Steering Committee considers the implementation of 2-1-1 Mendocino a critical enhancement to the existing infrastructure in the county. The

Steering Committee sees value in contracting with an existing 2-1-1 call center to minimize overhead costs. Support for 2-1-1 is linked to the perception that the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County has demonstrated the ability to successfully deliver high quality, mission driven, fiscally sound programs and is qualified to provide 2-1-1 services to Mendocino County. Accordingly, the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County is petitioning the Commission for designation a the provider of 2-1-1 services in Mendocino County.

Volunteer Center provided a three year budget as part of their application. Volunteer Center's budget and financial statements indicate a stable and solvent financial position. It appears that Volunteer Center has appropriate budgetary planning procedures to support 2-1-1 service at current call volumes.

The second section of the prescribed application sets forth the required service conditions that a 2-1-1 service provider must meet. Section 2 of Volunteer Center's application indicates that it does not and will not receive fees from referred organizations for referrals and no fees or charges levied to providers listed in its database.

The Volunteer Center of Sonoma currently provides I&R services in English and Spanish along with access to a telephone multi-lingual translation service. TTY service is in place. All of these options will be available with the implementation of 2-1-1 in Mendocino County.

In the third section of the prescribed application, the applicant must demonstrate its understanding of and must agree to adhere to the standards for delivery of I&R services as established by the Alliance of Information and Referral Services (AIRS). Volunteer Center of Sonoma County's Information and Referral program has internal protocols to ensure calls are handled consistent with guidelines developed by AIRS. AIRS' guidelines are the basis for the service delivery standards associated with use of the 2-1-1 dialing code as specified by the CPUC Decision 03-02-029. Volunteer Center's application included descriptions of its policies in the areas of call assessment and follow-up, confidentiality, database standards, disaster readiness, reports and measures, cooperative relationships, training, marketing, and program evaluation. These policies appear to meet the standards established by AIRS.

In the fourth section of the prescribed application, the applicant demonstrates its level of community support by including letters of endorsement from organizations and agencies that are stakeholders in the health and human services network in its community. Volunteer Center included in its application letters of endorsement from twenty different organizations and agencies in a broad range of health and human

service fields throughout Mendocino County. These endorsements demonstrate broad community support.

In processing Volunteer Center of Sonoma's 2-1-1 application, Communications Division considered the input of the Mendocino County government because it oversees the operations of county hospitals, a county welfare department, and numerous other agencies and programs in the fields of health and human services, and is best equipped to evaluate whether an I&R provider is well suited to provide comprehensive I&R service in Mendocino County. California's size and diversity, in geography, politics, and many other categories, argue against a statewide "one size fits-all" approach to evaluating and choosing comprehensive I&R providers. County governments can best apply local standards and local knowledge to this difficult but important task. On November 3, 2009, the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors, John Pinches, Chair, approved Res. No. 09-248 endorsing Volunteer Center's application to serve as the 2-1-1 provider of Mendocino County residents and employees. The Commission values the input of the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors on this matter, and takes official notice of its action.

D.03-02-029 did not specifically address the length of time for which the Commission's grant of authority to use the 2-1-1 dialing code should be made. Utilities and other frequent participants in Commission proceedings generally know that most Commission decisions, resolutions, and actions can be later modified or rescinded if a showing of sufficient grounds to do so is made in a filing before the Commission. However, most I&R providers and county governments are not frequent participants in Commission proceedings, and may benefit from some clarification of this point. The grant of authority to use the 2-1-1 dialing code in a county or group of counties is for an indefinite term and may be revised or rescinded if a showing of sufficient grounds to do so is made to the Commission. For the reasons cited in the previous paragraph, the Commission should consider a resolution by the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors as a crucial part of any showing that the authority to use the 2-1-1 dialing code for comprehensive I&R service for Mendocino County should be rescinded, reassigned, or modified. A letter to the Commission's Executive Director could serve to initiate such a process. Any such process should provide notice to all affected parties and an opportunity to be heard.

The Communications Division concludes that the application letter filed by Volunteer Center meets the requirements set forth in the Commission's order and recommends that the Commission approve this filing. Commission approval is based on the specifics of the application letter, and does not establish a precedent for the contents of future filings or for Commission approval of similar requests.

This is an uncontested matter in which the resolution grants the relief requested. Accordingly, pursuant to P.U.Code Section 311 (g) (2) and Rule 14.6(c) (2) of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, the otherwise applicable 30-day period for public review and comment is being waived.

### **Findings**

1. Volunteer Center of Sonoma County, hereinafter referred to as Volunteer Center sent its application letter for certification as the 2-1-1 service provider for Mendocino County to the Commission on October 12, 2009.
2. CAIRS submitted written comments in support of Volunteer Center's application for provision of 2-1-1 services in Mendocino County on November 11, 2009. No other comments were submitted.
3. Volunteer Center's application provides sufficient information to meet the four major sections of the 2-1-1 application process required by D. 03-02-039.
4. John Pinches, the Chairman of the Mendocino County Board of Supervisor signed Mendocino County Resolution 09-248 to the Commission on November 3, 2009, endorsing Volunteer Center's application to serve as the 2-1-1 provider for Mendocino County.
5. CD concludes that Volunteer Center's application meets the requirements established by D. 03-02-029 to use the 2-1-1 dialing code.

### **THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED that:**

1. Volunteer Center of Sonoma County is granted the authority to use the 2-1-1 abbreviated dialing code to provide information and referral (I&R) services to all of Mendocino County.
2. This authority is granted for an indefinite term, and is subject to review upon showing sufficient grounds to revise or rescind the term. Any process to contest, revise, or rescind this authority shall provide notice to all affected parties and an opportunity to be heard.
3. If Volunteer Center of Sonoma County cannot implement 2-1-1 dialing within a year after the Commission's approval of Volunteer Center of Sonoma County's application for provision of 2-1-1 service in Mendocino County and the needed tariffs of the telecommunications service providers ordered in Ordering Paragraphs

3, 4, and 7 of D.03-02-029, then, barring further Commission action, the certification of Volunteer Center of Sonoma County shall lapse so that another I&R provider may apply to offer service in a service territory containing Mendocino County.

4. Volunteer Center of Sonoma County shall notify the Director of the Communications Division in writing of the date 2-1-1 service is first rendered to the public, within five business days after service begins.

This Resolution is effective today.

I hereby certify that the Public Utilities Commission at its regular meeting on December 17, 2009 adopted this Resolution. The following Commissioners approved it:

/s/ Paul Clanon

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PAUL CLANON  
Executive Director

MICHAEL R. PEEVEY  
President  
DIAN M. GRUENEICH  
JOHN A. BOHN  
RACHELLE B. CHONG  
TIMOTHY ALAN SIMON  
Commissioners