

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
**Office of Unified Communications**



**Fiscal Year 2022**  
**Performance Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of  
**Heather McGaffin**  
Acting Director

Before the  
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety  
Council of the District of Columbia  
The Honorable Brooke Pinto, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building  
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Washington, DC 20004  
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Good afternoon, Chairperson Pinto, Committee members, staff, guests, and the viewing public. My name is Heather McGaffin, and I am the Acting Director of the Office of Unified Communications (OUC). I appreciate this opportunity to come before you to discuss OUC's performance in Fiscal Year 2022 and Fiscal Year 2023 to date.

I first want to take a moment to recognize the over three hundred and twenty employees and contractors who make up the OUC team. Each one of them is a dedicated professional charged with answering the call either on 311, 911, or in a support role for the two most used telephone numbers in the District of Columbia. While our team has faced monumental changes and challenges within the past eighteen months, one thing remains constant -- the dedication of our employees. Though we continue to experience higher than normal call volumes, we are receiving calls that are more complex, and are maintaining operations with a reduced number of staff, there is much to be proud of related to our performance, accomplishments, and new innovations, which I will discuss briefly in my testimony. Today, I also intend to be transparent about areas where improvements are needed and how we are addressing those gaps this fiscal year and beyond.

In FY22, 311 Customer Service Representatives handled 2.2 million calls for city services and information. DC311 continues to achieve its mission to make the public's interaction with the city government more accessible and efficient. We are deeply grateful for the feedback we regularly receive from stakeholders because it helps us prioritize efforts to add and update service request types available through our platforms, improve the overall customer service experience, and plan for the next season's events and programs.

Relatedly, we are pleased to share that through FY22 to present we participated in bi-monthly meetings of the City Administrator's 311 Working Group where we continue to collaborate with our sister agencies. Through this highly valued partnership, we have been able to work closely with DDOT, for example, to help bring clarity on access to workflows that support the District's Vision Zero Action Plan to enhance pedestrian safety. Some of these efforts involve amplifying messaging about how the public can make service requests for damaged or missing flex posts and for sidewalk repairs. Also, last fiscal year, as we analyzed service request trends and deepened our engagement with community partners, we took what we understood to be the most pressing concerns about issues that contribute to blight, like sanitation enforcement, graffiti removal, and leaf collection and the accessibility of those service request types through 311 platforms, back to the 311 working group to be addressed by DPW and our partners collectively.

As the conduit to city services, DC311 remains committed to maintaining and leveraging these partnerships to make requesting city services uncomplicated. We will remain accountable and reliable, and we will continue to explore ways to empower and invite every community in the District to join us in helping make DC the best city to live, work and play in.

In fact, beyond our role in helping process millions of quality-of-life interactions for DC residents, we are particularly proud of our support of DC's comeback and the opportunities we have created through DC311 to help unlock District residents' full potential to thrive in their hometown. One such example is our partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation

and their CRANK music program. This program allows for DC's young, budding musicians to produce music and learn about the entertainment industry. And now, when 311 callers are waiting to interact with a Customer Service Representative, they hear the District's official music, go-go, written, produced and performed by CRANK program participants. Not only does this partnership help these talented musicians reach a wider audience, but it also makes more visible the District's innovative youth programming aimed at positive engagement, personal and professional development, skill building, and increasing sense of purpose.

Turning now to 911 Operations, I will preface my remarks by saying that last year was transitional and transformative. Throughout the majority of FY22 (October 2021 – September 2022), the division was operating without a 911 Chief. However, since June 2022 when the Chief was onboarded, we have made steady progress on both stabilizing and shoring up this complex and dynamic operation.

A key achievement in FY22 is our acceptance into the Harvard Kennedy School's Alternative 911 Emergency Response Implementation Cohort. The technical support provided through this program is assisting the agency with institutionalizing progressive and more appropriate processes in an expanded 911 diversion program, most notably our mental health call management diversion program, which will increase the volume of calls being transferred to the Department of Behavioral Health's (DBH) Access Help Line and away from police dispatch.

Another notable accomplishment in FY22 is the establishment of a Telephone CPR Certification program at OUC. Each year an estimated 350,000 sudden cardiac arrest (SCA)

events occur in the United States in an out-of-hospital environment. Almost all these events result in a call for help to 911. Without quick intervention in the form of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and defibrillation, death from SCA is certain. Telecommunicators are the true first responders and a critical link in the cardiac arrest chain of survival; a telecommunicator can make the difference between life and death. All OUC 911 call takers have completed T-CPR training.

In FY22, of the 1.4 million 911 calls we handled, we received and investigated a total of 118 complaints. After thorough review of each one, we found that 84 of them were sustained. Thirty (30) of the sustained complaints were for blown addresses, 11 were for delayed dispatch, and 10 were for incorrect dispatch. We understand that there is no margin for error when lives are at stake, so in addition to providing more training, identifying subpar performance patterns, and taking personnel action when appropriate, we also began to look more closely at our 911 workflows by establishing an Emergency Communications Analyst (ECA) pilot program. ECAs detailed to this pilot are highly trained to support real-time, enhanced event analysis and non-emergency and emergency communications coordination. ECAs are deployed to each of our 4 shifts and since the official launch of the program in January, they have collaborated to ensure efficiency and the proper handling of thousands of 911 calls, preempting errors that may have resulted in delayed responses by responders in the field. Through this first-of-its-kind program in the National Capital Region, OUC is leading the way in creating solutions that help meet the challenges of the ever-evolving emergency communications center environment.

A fundamental element of improving performance in FY22, was onboarding a highly qualified Chief of Professional Standards and Development who has a deep knowledge of the industry including NG911/311, emerging technical solutions, quality assurance and quality improvement programs, key policy issues, and critical federal legislation. Under the Chief's leadership, the OUC's Office of Professional Standards and Development (OPSD) was reorganized, and training provided under the division increased by 400% over the previous fiscal year. In addition to identifying and mandating minimum training requirements for all agency divisions, OPSD also developed and launched the agency's first official Training Academy.

The OUC Training Academy will provide enhanced education and training offerings for OUC team members and other regional and national emergency communications center team members. The Academy will also consolidate all education, training classes, and courses necessary for the success of all OUC team members providing non-emergency, emergency, and associated support services to District residents and visitors. In addition, it will offer interoperable regional training. With the team of dynamic training specialists now in place, we are confident that we will have the capacity and ability to ensure our entire workforce can learn and enhance relevant skills to improve their job performance while fostering their professional growth.

OUC is committed to providing equitable access to 311 and 911 services for every resident and visitor to the District of Columbia, we have a game plan moving forward, and based on what we learned in FY22, we are clear eyed about defining where we have fallen short so we can critically evaluate performance to understand root causes, integrate best practices and stakeholder feedback, and quickly implement changes.

Thus, I am pleased to announce the official launch of a performance feedback survey on our website, at [ouc.dc.gov](http://ouc.dc.gov). There, users can complete a form to share concerns, suggestions, or complaints about our programs. Through the new survey, participation in ANC and other community meetings, and events we will host onsite to invite more collaboration with the public, we are striving to provide the best service possible, and we look forward to strengthening our relationships with all our stakeholders in FY23 and beyond. Chairperson Pinto, I am grateful for the open dialogue we have had about OUC's performance since my appointment and for your recent visit to observe our operations firsthand.

Thank you and the committee for your time today as well. This concludes my written testimony, and we look forward to answering any questions the committee may have at this time.