

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



**Fiscal Year 2023  
Performance Oversight Public Hearing**

Testimony of  
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Before the  
Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety  
The Honorable Brooke Pinto, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
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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 Director of the Office of Unified Communications (OUC). I appreciate this opportunity to come before you to discuss OUC's FY23 performance.

I am going to begin by recognizing the nearly 400 hundred employees of the OUC. As an industry subject matter expert with experience across the emergency communications ecosystem, from call taking and dispatching to being a field responder, I could not be more excited about leading this team, and what we have been able to accomplish in FY23 and will accomplish in the coming years. OUC is comprised of dedicated professionals 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.

In June 2023, a leading health insurance company, Assurance, shared the findings of analysis conducted of national 911 data.<sup>1</sup> This data showed the District handles more 911 calls per 1,000 residents than any other state, and that District residents overwhelmingly rely on cellular devices to call 911. As a result, the District of Columbia tops the list of states that utilize 911 services, with about 1,115 wireless calls to 911 per 1,000 residents annually. The District's 911 call center is one of the busiest in the country, historically ranking as the 4th busiest center behind those of New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

In FY23, OUC handled almost 1.8 million 911 calls for service and created just over 1 million dispatch events. The agency also took 1.47 million 311 calls and processed 440,000 city service requests. Simply put, OUC answers the call.

In this mighty effort, OUC continues to focus on the mission, to provide the most efficient responses to emergency and non-emergency calls for service. As I look back on FY23, I am grateful to have this opportunity to share that there is much to be proud of related to our performance and accomplishments. I will touch on a few highlights.

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<sup>1</sup> The States that Call 911 the Most. Available at: <https://assurance.com/health-insurance/us-states-that-call-911-the-most/>

First, during FY23, all 911 Operations personnel were certified in telephone CPR (T-CPR) and achieved 89% accuracy in identifying the need for T-CPR, starting CPR timely, and giving exact CPR instructions on 911 calls. This certification helps ensure that the workforce is prepared to provide high-quality CPR on every call when instructions are needed. The successful employment of T-CPR allowed numerous bystanders to save lives until EMS arrived to provide defibrillation and other vital interventions.

Next, OUC successfully revamped the critical vacancy recruitment program, shortening the recruitment and onboarding process timeline by 50%, thereby reducing 911 call taker vacancies by over 80%. This achievement directly correlates with feedback received from residents about queue time, and the agency understands that during emergencies seconds of wait time is agonizing.

Focused on strengthening the recruiting pipeline, OUC launched the agency's first Junior Academy, which graduated students from the program in the first year, representing 17 District schools. This program supports the bolstering of a pipeline of qualified candidates to fill critical vacancies. This free-of-cost, five (5) week program familiarized high school students with OUC career opportunities. It also provided participants with exposure to the public safety communications ecosystem and provided youth who represent and reflect DC residents, who understand the city and District culture, and who are invested in our communities, the opportunity to explore and develop career goals, learn from professionals, and build a network. Please visit our website at [ouc.dc.gov](http://ouc.dc.gov) to learn more about this incredible program. The next cohort will begin in March.

Also, in FY23, OUC made demonstrative progress in agency efforts to enhance transparency. In particular, the launch of the 911 performance dashboard provides insight into the work of the city's first, first responders – 911 call takers and dispatchers – whose efforts are behind the scenes but nonetheless critical to building a safer, stronger DC. Also, in FY23, OUC made demonstrative progress in agency efforts to enhance transparency. In particular, the launch of the 911 performance dashboard provides insight into the work of the city's first, first responders – 911 call takers and dispatchers – whose efforts are behind the scenes but nonetheless critical to building a safer, stronger DC. Last fiscal year, of the nearly 1.8 million 911 calls received, 77.86 % were

answered in 15 seconds or less. In fact, the average 911 answer time was 12.03 seconds. Additionally, in FY23, the 911 operation handled 10,136 Text-to-911 sessions. The operation also dispatched FEMS 228,820 times and MPD 643,331 times.

Throughout the last year, OUC collaborated with Fire and EMS and MPD to ensure the collective efforts of the agencies are aligned as closely as possible. For example, Fire and EMS personnel, along with OUC Training Specialists, completed Feedback Fluency training to assist with quality assurance reviews. Additionally, MPD cadets and tenured members completed chair-side observations, during which they were paired with call takers and dispatchers to observe real time incident handling. Also, through FY23 to date, OUC worked closely with the PSJ Cluster agencies on the implementation of the PowerPhone Total Response call processing protocol system and will be making the transition soon.

OUC remains committed to taking tangible steps to enhance racial equity in its programming. The agency centered outreach and public education programming and analyzed request trends in Wards 7 and 8 and engaged more directly and frequently with the Latino/a community and others with limited or no English proficiency. To ensure achievement of these strategic objectives, OUC identified a diversity, inclusion, and racial equity program lead and a language access coordinator, who are participating members of Office of Racial Equity's (ORE) planning and development cohort. OUC developed a racial equity mission statement that aligns with the ORE's vision and mission for the District, and created the agency draft racial equity action plan.

Through FY23 to present, OUC engaged with more than 30,000 residents at dozens of community events and resource fairs to raise visibility of services available through 311 platforms in these and other targeted communities across the city. In fact, due to these concerted efforts, service request submissions in Wards 7 and 8 increased in the last two fiscal years, in FY22 and FY23, by more than 8,000 service requests. The Agency's participation in CORE team walks and its "Live with an ANC" events were highly effective in engaging with communities and presented opportunities for the public to learn more about how DC 311 supports the removal of blight and provides convenient access to services for all. By the end of FY24, the Agency will have launched an

enhanced service request portal and mobile app that features the ability to translate 50 service request types to Spanish, and an additional 100 in the six (6) most spoken languages in the District.

OUC is clear eyed about where the Agency has fallen short, critically evaluating performance to understand root causes, integrating best practices and stakeholder feedback, and reacting quickly to implement changes. Thus, the OUC approach to achieving the highest level of performance possible is directly tied to its focus on three pillars – our people, our training, and our technology.

To this end, in FY23, OUC created an Agency Wellness Coordinator position. This employee will serve as an ambassador for employee well-being. They will act as OUC’s main point of contact on wellness-related programs and campaigns, assist DCHR with monitoring and evaluation to ensure employees are being effectively engaged with substantive programming, encourage employee participation in wellness activities, and create enthusiasm around leading a healthy lifestyle.

In addition to our workforce completing more than 22,000 hours of role specific training, OUC also implemented a new policy that details requirements for operational employees to complete a minimum of 40 hours of training every fiscal year, and those in the IT and administrative divisions to complete a minimum of 24 hours, in addition to the sessions mandated by the District government like cybersecurity and sexual harassment training.

In the coming weeks, OUC anticipates that the Agency will begin to realize benefits from recent investments in technology. In particular, the integration of a standards-based call processing protocol system, PowerPhone Total Response, will ensure that call takers finally have at their fingertips technology that is responsive to callers’ needs. This technology uses a proven and patented investigative questioning approach that helps enhance caller and responder safety. Consistent call handling is the foundation of effective and efficient response. We also anticipate that once this solution is in place, diversion of calls to the Nurse Triage Line and DBH’s Access Help Line will increase.

I am grateful for the testimony shared today by members of the public and continue to encourage the use of our performance feedback form, which is on the OUC website, at [ouc.dc.gov](http://ouc.dc.gov). Please

use the form to share concerns, suggestions, or complaints about OUC programs. Collaboration with all our stakeholders enables us to provide the best service possible and we deeply value our engagement.

Chairperson Pinto, and committee members, thank you for your time. This concludes my testimony, and we look forward to answering any questions the committee may have.