

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



**FY25 Performance Oversight Hearing
Office of Unified Communications**

Testimony of
Heather McGaffin
Director, OUC

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

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Room 500
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Good afternoon, Chairperson Pinto, Committee members, staff, and members of the 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 FY25 performance.

I want to begin by recognizing the 357 employees of OUC. OUC is made up of five divisions staffed by professionals charged with answering the calls of residents and visitors to our Nation's Capital using 311, 911, and non-emergency lines. This past weekend, during a historical winter weather event, the first of the first responders answered over 5,773 calls, both emergency and otherwise.

In FY 2025, the heroes under the headset answered 1.4 million calls on 911, nearly 900,000 calls on 311 for a total of 2.3 million calls total. These numbers mean for another consecutive year, the OUC remains one of the busiest in the nation. During the year, the team actively supported several large-scale events, dignitary and official visits, and a total of five National Special Security Events (NSSEs). We have also been actively supporting the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) in their Joint Operations Center since August.

OUC is responsible for a lot of moving parts beyond answering and processing 311 and 911 calls. We are responsible for ten radio sites; close to 1,100 Mobile Data Terminals; over 9,000 radios; and close to 19,000 records requests and official court documents. This year we hosted best practice visits from PSAP, police and fire department leadership who traveled from 10 states and three countries. I want to thank the diverse team at the OUC who handles all the moving parts of the public safety and public service infrastructure that ensures success for all of the field responders in our capital city. They ensure that our city is safer.

The APCO Public Safety Communications Incident Handling Process standard states Emergency Communications Centers should answer 75% of all 911 calls in 10 seconds or less and 90% in 20 seconds or less. In FY25, OUC met both of those standards. 90.2% of all 911 calls were answered in 10 seconds or less and 93% of calls were answered in 20 seconds or less. We continue to be relentless about improving this performance. In FY25, we made huge gains and will work to ensure this is sustainable. The average call answer time for 911 calls was 4.3 seconds; this is down

from the 15.1 seconds in FY24. We update our metrics regularly on our agency's performance dashboard which is available at ouc.dc.gov.

In 2025, the agency made large investments and advancements in the core areas of training, staffing, and technology. I am grateful to share some of those accomplishments here. In July 2025, the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) honored OUC with the Technology in Leadership Award for a Large Agency. This award honors one of the 6,000 Emergency Communications Center from across the nation who implements technology in such a way that it extensively benefits the community they serve. In June 2025, the agency reopened the Public Safety Communications Center in Ward 1. The multi-year, multi-million renovation focused on a larger building with state-of-the-art technology that allows the city to have two operations centers. This creates redundancy, resilience, and creates geographic diversity of our systems. The centers can run as one or can be separated out to run as two. A model in which Washington, DC is leading the way.

This year, OUC also became the largest PSAP to implement an AI system to perform non-biased quality assurance reviews on 100% of our 911 calls. The system has been live since December and is continually providing feedback to telecommunicators. I want it to be clear all dispatch technology that we implement is done in collaboration with the two Chiefs and Medical Director, including our CAD system and call processing system. This includes Total Response, previously known as Power Phone. This system asks questions based on what is happening with the person needing assistance. Algorithms trigger dispatches, including sending calls to diversion programs such as Nurse Triage Line and Access Help Line.

Additionally, this past year, OUC received APCO's first Agency Training Program Accreditation, a Project 33 initiative. This is an accreditation program that recognizes agencies that meet or exceed national training standards and demonstrate a commitment to excellence in public safety communications. This year the employees of OUC participated in nearly 16,000 hours of continuing education. 98% of our staff also completed their recertification course in Telecommunicator CPR. Employees participated in many other aspects of training including courses in customer service and soft skills and relevant real world training topics such as being

able to more accurately identify calls that involve swatting, human trafficking, mental health crises, and domestic violence.

While there are still gaps in staffing, I am pleased to say there are several areas where we have full compliments. This includes police and fire dispatchers and supervisors. This was done by expanding how we hire, including recruiting tenured dispatchers and retirees from the DC Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (FEMS). This year, we also developed a relationship with JobCorp Potomac which allowed participants to take courses at the UCC campus while being compensated by JobCorp. This allows candidates to learn the role and decide if it is right for them. We look to continue this partnership this year. Currently, we have 24 vacancies for entry level call takers. We will be onboarding new employees this month and next. I want to note that we have spent resources ensuring our employees are proficient in multiple disciplines, which makes for a more effective workflow and has been instrumental in ensuring that we meet national standards. Our agency now has competitive regional pay thanks to Mayor Bowser's investment and recruitment bonuses - having a dynamic workplace culture focused on advancement and employees holistically are assets to our success in attracting high performers in a highly saturated area of public safety answering points. I'm also happy to share 160 individuals are scheduled to attend our Prospect Day tomorrow.

Before I conclude my testimony, I want to take this time to provide context that is grounded in accurate, verifiable information to help inform public discussions and support understanding of the way that OUC collaborates with its partners to provide services. While OUC is one of the most directly contacted agencies in government, we are the conduit to other city services.

In 311, we work with agencies such as the Department of Public Works (DPW) and Department of Transportation (DDOT) to obtain information from residents and visitors and create service requests. Those service requests are then sent electronically to the receiving agency who reviews, assigns, and executes on the request. Agencies are responsible for providing notes, pictures, and closing the requests. For 911, the partnerships with MPD and FEMS are strong and those agencies have employees imbedded in OUC. FEMS has 24/7 coverage with a Battalion Chief and Fire Liaison Officers and EMS Liaison Officers complete with sleeping quarters. For MPD, a

Commander is assigned to OUC and each day four dispatchers are assigned to MPD's Real Time Crime Center and Joint Operations Center.

For all 911 calls the questions we ask are created by MPD and FEMS. OUC does not create any questions or response plans that are asked or dispatched. We rely on the subject matter experts in those fields to ask the questions that will help them determine the correct response. Each year, the Chiefs and the Medical Director have a responsibility to work with our teams to review those questions and determine if any changes need to be made. Our teams work closely with both departments to add additional call types they request. In 2024, the agency added over 20 call types for FEMS alone to better serve residents and visitors. Those call types included expanded BLS, Metro, and Water Rescue responses including the BLS Unconscious card. All call types that we dispatch are approved by the Office of the Medical Director, the Fire Chief and the Police Chief.

While I will always recognize there is room for improvement, I am extremely proud of the work that is done at OUC. We continue to make strides in the key areas and are a global example of emergency services. Our performance dashboard and complaint review process has helped us to educate and ameliorate systems. We look at each complaint granularly and make determinations on how it can improve. One of the most asked questions OUC is why a unit that is not closer is not dispatched. The capabilities of each unit in this city vary and while the stations are there, they may not be occupied or staffed in the moment. The system used to determine availability for dispatch is automated and the closest unit with the capabilities needed is dispatched. The decision to override a dispatch or run order is the made by the Fire Liaison Officer.

As I close today, I want to thank the hundreds of employees who worked over this past week during the winter storm. They worked at four locations throughout the city supporting residents, visitors, and partner agencies. Team members spent the entire weekend at OUC leaving their families and loved ones to ensure we were able to answer the call. On Sunday, 100% of all calls made to 911 were answered in under 10 seconds.

This concludes my testimony, and I look forward to answering any questions the committee may have regarding our performance in FY25 and FY26 to date.