

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of Unified Communications



Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Director Heather McGaffin

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

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Room 120
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Good afternoon, Chairperson Pinto, members of the Committee, Committee staff, and councilmembers. My name is Heather McGaffin, and I am the Director of the Office of Unified Communications (OUC). Mayor Bowser's FY26 budget, *Grow DC*, is a bold, initiative-taking, growth agenda to generate new economic activity, create new jobs for DC residents, and increase revenue to support city services and programs. The strategic and thoughtful investments made to ensure that OUC continues to provide the services that the public deserves are clearly demonstrated in the agency's proposed FY26 budget, and I am grateful for this opportunity to highlight key components of it today.

Grow DC acknowledges the economic realities we face by prioritizing the most critical investments needed to ensure that our city continues to be a place people want to call home, visit, and do business in. I am immensely grateful to Mayor Bowser for providing OUC with the resources needed to execute its role at the highest level in providing efficient emergency and non-emergency communications and reliable access to city services and information.

I want to recognize all the employees of OUC who demonstrate their dedication to serving the public by answering the call. To put this commitment in perspective, last year our 911 call takers and dispatchers managed 1.7 million 911 calls and dispatched first responders from the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and DC Fire and EMS (FEMS) approximately 900,000 times. In addition to processing tens of thousands of non-emergency police reports, professionals at OUC provided lifesaving care by providing first aid, CPR, and baby delivery instructions and hosting text-to-911 sessions with thousands of callers.



Last year, our 311 customer service representatives handled nearly 750,000 calls and facilitated the processing of over 500,000 city service requests in coordination with dozens of our DC government agency partners. Additionally, our 311 social media team processed tens of thousands of requests posted on X last year. We prioritized meeting District residents where they are by maintaining platforms that allow them to request city services in the ways that they decide are most convenient for them. X has become one of the most popular methods of engagement with 311 and this team continues to set the standard for excellence in customer service.

We are committed to giving each resident and visitor the peace of mind that we are here when they need us most, whether that is for non-emergency help or in their most dire time. With investments in recruitment, technology, and training, we have been able to achieve 94.01% of all 911 calls being answered in 15 seconds or less so far in 2025. Additionally, we have been able to achieve accreditation of our training curriculum through the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials Project 33 Initiative; and maintain our technology in alignment with the national standard of run time of 99.999% of the time. The entire OUC workforce understands the tremendous responsibility of this workload and takes their role in helping to maintain safe, clean, and engaged communities across the city very seriously. The Mayor's Proposed FY26 budget for OUC will enable it to meet the demand of a growing and thriving DC with the resources it needs to do just that.

The Mayor's Proposed Operating Budget at OUC for FY26 is \$64,693,200, a 1.6 percent increase over the FY25 Approved Budget, and supports 425 FTEs. Specifically, regarding our FTEs, the investments made by Mayor Bowser will allow for pay parity for 311 and 911 employees whose



salaries are not aligned with their colleagues, as well as increased pay for 911 call takers so they can be paid at a rate that is competitive with their counterparts across the National Capital Region (NCR). Regional and national studies showed OUC's 911 call takers are among the lowest paid in the region. By investing in our entry level position of call takers, we are able to build a solid foundation that allows for career ladder growth for the individual employee and allows us to remain competitive in the region for the best talent.

Along with our strategic efforts to provide well rounded support to our 911 professionals in the areas of wellness and training, OUC's FY26 budget will enable us to continue to offer retention bonuses based on performance for incumbent employees and recruitment incentives for new hires. Earlier this year, we shared that we were successful in reducing our vacancies in 911 operations by 90%. Last year's overhaul of the recruitment and onboarding processes, coupled with the continuation of providing these incentives, supports a balanced approach to maintaining minimum staffing without having to rely on overtime in the coming fiscal year. The NCR has the highest concentration of Public Safety Answering Points in the United States and therefore centers remain highly competitive for a shrinking 911 workforce. OUC must stay competitive, continue to offer good fringe benefits, and have a workplace that is one people want to come to, with resources such as wellness programs and initiatives that celebrate our employees.

In FY26, major investments have been made in technology and capital projects for OUC. Last year, the agency faced notable technology challenges. However, our teams rallied quickly to stabilize and move the emergency communications systems and programs forward. In fact, we recently learned, and I am proud to announce that, as a result of these efforts, OUC was selected



to receive the 2025 APCO International Emergency Communications Center of the Year for Technology Leadership Award. The agency will accept this award at the annual APCO conference in July. Despite this industry recognition, our high degree of focus and attention on this area continues as it should.

The proposed FY26 budget includes \$18.5 million to support the 29 FTEs of the IT Division and maintenance support and equipment costs for the technology infrastructure, which includes telephony, radio, mobile data computing hardware, and software systems. Additionally, in FY26, of our \$13,783,194 capital budget, \$7,454,244 will be used for upgrades to the 311 service request platform, a Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) enhancement, creating a virtual radio prime site and deployment of 160 emergency communications consolettes as well as the replacement of 500 portable radios for DC government agencies, and for funding for upgrades to radio tower sites across the city.

Relatedly, I would like to take a moment now to mention the renovation of the Public Safety Communications Center (PSCC), OUC's secondary operations site, is nearly complete. The project represents the critical capital investments Mayor Bower has made in public safety through the years that help ensure long-term operational continuity and resilience for the District's emergency communications infrastructure. This multi-phased project modernizes and expands the facility to fully support 911, 311, and Radio/Mobile Data Computing operations, addressing urgent needs in mechanical systems, spatial planning, and technology infrastructure. PSCC will be staffed to operate concurrently with the Unified Communications Center (UCC) facility. It truly exemplifies the District's commitment to delivering resilient, modernized infrastructure for public



safety operations by providing enhanced operational capacity, workforce flexibility, and technological infrastructure aligned with the evolving demands of first in class emergency communications.

To support ongoing related costs, the Public Services Hotel Occupancy Fee Amendment Act of 2025 is also proposed in *Grow DC*. This subtitle imposes an eighty cent-per-night fee for occupied hotel rooms. It recognizes that visitors to our city rely on our emergency and non-emergency systems. As we continue to welcome record numbers of visitors, not only will this fee help us to thrive as a world-class city, but it will also ensure that we are able to provide world-class services as an agency.

As I conclude my testimony, I want to restate Mayor Bowser's proposed FY26 budget provides OUC with the resources necessary to efficiently manage the thoughtfully planned growth of the District's 911 and 311 public safety and public service communications platforms. OUC remains committed to being innovative, resilient, and steadfast in serving the residents and visitors of this incredible city.

OUC remains a center that other jurisdictions look to and reference when they are upgrading technology, implementing new programs, and collaborating with new ideas. We are excited about how we will continue to grow OUC while we *Grow DC*.

We appreciate the Committee's support of our work, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have at this time.

