

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



Performance Oversight Hearing on
The Office of Unified Communications

Testimony of
Heather McGaffin
Director

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

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1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 120
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Good afternoon, Chairperson Pinto, Committee members, staff, guests, and 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 FY24 performance.

I am beginning by recognizing the nearly 400 employees of OUC. OUC is comprised of dedicated professionals charged with answering the call on 311, 911, or in support of the two most used telephone numbers in the District of Columbia. In the past 30 days, in addition to handling the average monthly workload of approximately 70,000 911 calls, 63,000 police and fire and EMS dispatches, 60,000 311 calls, and 60,000 city service requests, we have also played key roles in the successful execution of three National Special Security Events (NSSE) while contending with historic severe weather and other large scale incident management and responses. This required countless hours of planning, meetings, drills, tests, rehearsals, exercises, activations, and days-long team member deployments to locations across the city.

I deeply appreciate my team's dedication to our mission every day, and especially in these historical moments as we ensure that our city successfully does what needs to be done when the eyes of the world are upon us.

In FY24, OUC handled approximately 1.68 million 911 calls. Seventy-two percent of those calls were handled in 15 seconds. The National Emergency Number Association (NENA) standard for call-handling states that 90% of calls should be handled within 15 seconds. We are relentless about improving our performance and we have made strides in this area, particularly since the onboarding of additional 911 call takers and dispatchers, which I will discuss in greater detail momentarily. In fact, through FY24 we saw incremental gains around this metric, and in FY25 so far, the upward trend has been that approximately 94% of calls have been answered in 15 seconds or less and the average answer time is 2 seconds.

Turning to 311 Operations, our 311 Customer Service Representatives answered 93% of calls within 90 seconds in FY24, most of which were picked up by a live agent in about 27 seconds. In FY25 so far, 311's call handling performance continues to be as strong. OUC answers the call.

While FY24 was not without its challenges, we remained mission focused and worked in close collaboration with agencies across the government to strive toward providing the responses to emergency and non-emergency calls that District residents deserve. And, as we look back on FY24, I am grateful to have this opportunity to highlight a few of our accomplishments.

First, last fiscal year, we reduced 911 Operations' vacancies by 90%. To achieve this, we successfully revamped our critical vacancy recruitment program and shortened the onboarding process timeline by 50%. This achievement directly correlates with residents' very valid concerns about queue time and our understanding that during emergencies seconds of wait time is agonizing. In FY24, OUC hosted five Prospect Days and participated in the District's public safety hiring fairs and recruitment events across the city and region. We interacted with more than 3000 applicants and now have a robust list of candidates ready to become part of our incredible team.

In that vein, I want to take a moment to thank the Mayor's Office of Returning Citizen's (MORCA) Director, Lamont Carey, who is a tireless advocate for returning citizens. Through a strong partnership with his team, we recently onboarded three District returning residents who support our 311 Division as Customer Service Representatives. OUC is a proud ally and partner in Mayor Bowser's efforts to help residents break the cycle of recidivism.

Through FY24, we also collaborated with the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (FEMS) and the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) to ensure our efforts to help maintain public safety continue to be aligned as closely as possible. An example of this work includes OUC's successful transition to the Total Response Power Phone protocol system on

February 29, 2024. Total Response Power Phone helps ensure that call takers have technology that is responsive to callers' needs at their fingertips. This technology uses a proven and patented investigative questioning approach that helps enhance caller and responder safety. In addition to engaging in various cross training activities, we also meet regularly to review event types, associated workflows, and response plans so adjustments can be made to help ensure that responses to emergencies are as appropriate and efficient as possible.

Another partnership strengthened in FY24, that has resulted in improved performance in 911 Operations, is with the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) and Chief Technology Officer Stephen Miller. Together, we devised and implemented a 22-point plan to shore up our vast and complex technology infrastructure which included dedicating additional resources with highly specialized subject matter expertise to monitor and maintain our systems, improving the change notification and process protocols, and updating the hardware for all systems.

Also, in FY24, we made demonstrative progress in our efforts to enhance transparency. In particular, the expansion of our 911 performance dashboard, which can be found at ouc.dc.gov, 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. Newly added metrics on the dashboard include a breakdown of staffing for all 911 Operations roles per shift and data on Advanced Life Support (ALS) dispatches.

Lastly, I recognize that OUC employees are integral to achieving the city's public safety initiatives. For this reason, ensuring that we are well trained and prepared to do this lifesaving work is one of the highest priorities. Accordingly, last fiscal year our workforce participated in more than 27,000 hours of training, which improved skills and knowledge, increased productivity and performance, and created uniformity of work processes across the agency, leading to increased

job satisfaction and improved morale. We also onboarded our first Wellness Coordinator. She administers a comprehensive wellness program by coordinating, planning, and facilitating a broad range of mental, physical, and financial work-life balance focused activities and programs for all employees. This work also includes hosting classes, speakers, seminars, personal training, and wellness assessments that promote healthy lifestyles. In FY25, the Coordinator designed and opened the Agency's first onsite wellness room, a dedicated, private, and restorative space.

As one of the nation's 1,100 certified emergency number professionals, a Next Generation 911 subject matter expert, and recognized leader in the industry, I am committed and passionate about being able to provide to the residents and visitors of our Nation's Capital an emergency number system we can all be confident in. I have the opportunity on a regular basis to collaborate with centers across this nation, with other leaders of large public safety answering points, and contribute to conversations about progress. What I can assure you and the public relying on our system is that Washington DC's 911 system remains a model in the industry as we continuously and innovatively implement new approaches and strengthen our commitment to national standards and best practices.

As I close my testimony, I want to reiterate that we are clear eyed about where we have fallen short, continually and critically evaluating performance to understand root causes, integrating best practices and stakeholder feedback, and reacting quickly to implement changes. Thus, our approach to achieving the highest level of performance possible will remain rooted in our steady focus on three pillars this fiscal year and beyond - - our people, our training, and our technology.

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 regarding our performance in FY24 and FY25 to the present.