



ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 1E
GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

2605 SHERMAN AVE, NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20001
ANC1E.ORG
1E@ANC.DC.GOV

BRADLEY GALLAGHER
1E01@ANC.DC.GOV

BOBBIE LANCASTER
1E02@ANC.DC.GOV

MICHAEL WRAY, TREASURER
1E03@ANC.DC.GOV

RASHIDA BROWN, VICE CHAIR
1E04@ANC.DC.GOV

PHILIP NEWLAND
1E05@ANC.DC.GOV

JOSH JACOBSON, SECRETARY
1E06@ANC.DC.GOV

BRIAN FOOTER, CHAIR
1E07@ANC.DC.GOV

#1E-2023-0902: RESOLUTION CALLING FOR SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS AT THE OFFICE OF UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS AND CREATION OF AN INDEPENDENT 911 TASK FORCE

WHEREAS, ANC 1E has grave and growing concerns about the performance and dependability of the Office of Unified Communications' (OUC) 911 emergency call-taking, text-to-911, and dispatch functions; and

WHEREAS, OUC notes on its website, "911 is the public's lifeline for police, fire, and medical services in the District of Columbia;" and

WHEREAS, In recent years, D.C.'s 911 service has been plagued with call-taking and dispatch errors that have contributed to the death or injury of several residents; and

WHEREAS, Far from being a lifeline to residents, OUC's 911 service has repeatedly hindered access to lifesaving care; and

WHEREAS, These chronic problems have diminished residents' faith in our city's emergency response system; and

WHEREAS, Compounding these failures is OUC's historical disinclination to release detailed information about the causes of these failures; and

WHEREAS, The lack of transparency hampers OUC's ability to remedy persistent failures, and it also frustrates the Council's obligation to conduct effective oversight and ensure OUC has the resources it needs to truly be a "lifeline" to residents; and

WHEREAS, OUC's call answering performance declined precipitously¹ from January to February 2023, and the call abandonment rate increased steadily² from August 2022 to February 2023; and

WHEREAS, The Auditor's 2021 report and recommendations³ District's 911 System: Reforms Needed to Meet Safety Needs provided an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Office of Unified Communications (OUC) Operations Division against national standards, a review of a sample of 911 call recording and data, an evaluation of OUC culture and training, along with a review of OUC's technological capabilities and OUC's internal investigations of past incidents; and

¹ <https://twitter.com/dccrimefacts/status/1696488099738435857?s=20>

² <https://twitter.com/dccrimefacts/status/1696488083150045206?s=20>

³ <https://dcauditor.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/OUC.Report.10.19.21.pdf>

WHEREAS, According to the Office of the D.C. Auditor’s March 2023 implementation status report⁴, OUC had “overstated” the actions it had taken to implement the Auditor’s recommendations, and the Auditor’s report noted that OUC had not been “accurate” or “transparent” in describing some of its after action reviews; and

WHEREAS, The recently-enacted Office of Unified Communications (OUC) Transparency and Accuracy Amendment Act⁵ requires OUC to publicly report the “number of shifts operated under minimum staffing levels;” therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, That ANC 1E requests request promptly undertaking the following actions:

- 1) **Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety Oversight Hearing.** We are thankful that the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety will hold an oversight hearing on October 5th, 2023. This hearing must include OUC Director Heather McGaffin and City Administrator Kevin Donahue if they are not already planning to attend.
- 2) **Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety Auditor’s Update on OUC’s implementation of the 2021 Recommendation.** The Committee invite D.C. Auditor Kathleen Patterson to provide a status update on OUC’s implementation of the Auditor’s 2021 recommendations. The Council should ascertain from the Auditor whether implementation and transparency have improved since Director McGaffin took the helm at OUC.
- 3) **Updated Data Missing from Dashboard.** The Council should further ensure that the updated call answering, text-to-911, and dispatch data is made publicly available. The new (September 8, 2023) OUC 911 Performance Dashboard provides data on 911 call handling, dispatching, staffing, and more. The Office of Unified Communications (OUC) Transparency and Accuracy Amendment Act requires, "Average and maximum answer to dispatch times" for 911 calls. The dashboard is missing "dispatch queue to dispatch" times — how long it takes to dispatch a 911 call after it's answered. The dashboard is also missing the maximum call processing times each day.
- 4) **Staffing Data.** OUC publicly report daily staffing statistics. Those statistics should include the number of call-takers (including staff who respond to text-to-911 messages) and dispatchers working each shift and the number of employee call-outs. It should also indicate whether staffing levels for each shift meet minimum staffing requirements, and if not, what the differential is between actual and required staffing levels. This data is important, but it is insufficiently granular to assess specific staffing needs and shortcomings. For instance, it does not provide the Council with any information as to whether certain shifts are more prone to understaffing. That information could help the Council to determine whether additional funding is required to provide incentives for OUC employees working those shifts (as the city of Austin, Texas, recently did for overnight shift workers at its 911 call center).

Should OUC fail to agree to publish this information within 30 calendar days of the date of this resolution, ANC 1E strongly urge the Council to introduce legislation expanding the OUC Transparency and Accuracy Amendment Act to require that OUC publicly report the above-listed staffing statistics.

- 5) **Publication of 911 Calls/Transcripts.** OUC must make all 911 call recordings or transcripts available (after redacting personally identifiable information (PII)) to the person who made the call to 911 as requested.

⁴ <https://dcauditor.org/report/911-reform-status-report-2-progress-made-but-transparency-needed/>

⁵ <https://lms.dccouncil.gov/downloads/LIMS/53497/Meeting1/Enrollment/B25-0374-Enrollment1.pdf?Id=166624>

ANC 1E urges OUC to promptly issue a revised call/transcript release policy as described above. Should OUC fail to agree to do so within 30 calendar days of the date of this resolution, ANC 1E urges the Council to act without hesitation or delay in introducing legislation expanding the Office of Unified Communications (OUC) Transparency and Accuracy Amendment Act to require these critical transparency measures.

- 6) **Independent 911 Task Force.** The Council should create an independent 911 task force charged with examining chronic and systemic problems at OUC and issuing recommendations to address them. Additionally, the task force should assess whether the reliability and accuracy of 911 call taking, text-to-911, and dispatch functions would improve by reassigning them to D.C. Fire and Emergency Medical Services (FEMS). To inform its assessment, the task force should request and examine the results of the 2019 Paramedic Call Taker Pilot Program, which “demonstrated that [OUC could refer] a significantly higher number of calls ... to the [Nurse Triage Line]” than it had been. Further, the task force should review the complete list of codes OUC call-takers use to categorize phone calls and texts and assess whether they are sufficiently clear, unambiguous, and comprehensive to properly prioritize calls and texts. In addition to examining OUC’s performance issues, the task force should assess OUC’s hiring and retention practices and compare those to 911 call centers in other jurisdictions that have managed to improve their staffing levels. The task force should issue recommendations to the Council and OUC identifying ways OUC can improve its hiring and retention practices, now and in the long-term (e.g., creating career pathways for staff).

The task force should report directly to the Council. The body must include independent outside experts who are familiar with FEMS and Metropolitan Police Department operations, and who have not previously worked at or consulted for OUC. Similar to the EMS Task Force created in 2007, the 911 task force should issue its report and recommendations as expeditiously as possible.

BE IT RESOLVED, Commissioner Josh Jacobson is designated to represent the Commission in all matters relating to this Resolution. In the event that Commissioner Jacobson cannot carry out his representative duties for any reason, ANC 1E authorizes the Chair to designate another Commissioner to represent the Commission in all matter relating to this Resolution.

#####

Certification:

After providing sufficient notice for and with a quorum of 6 present at its September 27, 2023 meeting, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1E voted, with 6 Yeas, 0 Nays, and 0 Abstentions, to adopt the above resolution.



Brian Footer
Chairperson, ANC 1E



Josh Jacobson
Secretary, ANC 1E