



ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3C
GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
CLEVELAND PARK • MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE HEIGHTS •
WOODLAND-NORMANSTONE • WOODLEY PARK

Single Member District Commissioners
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ANC3C Resolution 2023-CONSENT
Resolution Regarding Grave Concerns About Performance and Reliability at the
Office of Unified Communications (OUC)

WHEREAS ANC 3C 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;

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

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;

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

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

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

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;

WHEREAS OUC's call answering performance [declined](#) precipitously from January to February 2023, and the call abandonment rate [increased](#) steadily from August 2022 to February 2023;

WHEREAS the [Auditor's 2021 report and recommendations](#) *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;

WHEREAS according to the Office of the D.C. Auditor's March 2023 [implementation status report](#), 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;

WHEREAS the recently-enacted [Office of Unified Communications \(OUC\) Transparency and Accuracy Amendment Act](#) requires OUC to publicly report the "number of shifts operated under minimum staffing levels.";

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that ANC 3C requests promptly undertaking the following actions:

1. **Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety Oversight Hearing.** The Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety must hold an oversight hearing with OUC Director Heather McGaffin and City Administrator Kevin Donahue.
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 3C 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 anyone who requests

them. Further, OUC must, on its own initiative, immediately publish 911 call recordings or transcripts following an incident involving suspected or alleged OUC error, as well as incidents that are of particular public interest. If MPD is required by law to provide footage of officers' body-worn cameras, OUC can and should likewise publish call transcripts or recordings (with PII redacted).

ANC 3C 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 3C 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.

Finally, pending the outcome of the independent task force's review, OUC should delay its [plans](#) to implement the PowerPhone Total Response protocol system by the end of calendar year 2023. The PowerPhone protocol is a system that standardizes 911 call takers' questions. As was reported in the Office of the D.C. Auditor (ODCA)'s October 2021 report on OUC, changing call-taking protocols will require a massive investment in retraining and will delay OUC's ability to measure staff performance. Specifically, the report noted that changing call-taking protocol “requires the retraining of OUC staff, as well as the modification of the current Quality Assurance process, and will require the understanding and cooperation of employees who must transition (for the third time) to a new protocol system. More importantly, it will further delay the time that the OUC will be able to generate performance-based metrics.” Moreover, the report made clear that any change in call-taking

procedures and performance measurements should “include support from MPD, FEMS, and the Medical Director.” At this point in time, it is unclear whether that support exists.

BE IT RESOLVED that ANC3C authorizes the Chair and the Commissioner for 3C02 to represent the Commission on this matter.

Attested by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janell Pagats", written in a cursive style.

Janell Pagats

Chair, on September 18, 2023

This resolution was approved by voice vote on September 18, 2023, at a scheduled and noticed public meeting of ANC 3C at which a quorum (a minimum of 5 of 8 commissioners) was present.