



08/28/2023

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6B@anc.dc.gov

The Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

via Email

Re: Failures of OUC and the 911 System

Dear Councilmembers,

At a regularly scheduled, properly noticed meeting on June 13, 2023, with a quorum present, Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 6B voted 7-0-0 to send this letter. This was based on a recommendation from ANC 6B's Special Committee on Public Safety that ANC 6B urge the DC Council to promptly investigate the failures of the 9-1-1 system, either by a taskforce or by a special subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. The goal of the Special Committee on Public Safety and ANC 6B is to prevent future failures in 9-1-1 response and ensure that any resident or visitor within the District of Columbia, in their most critical time of need, will connect with a 9-1-1 operator who will ensure prompt emergency assistance.

We are aware from our neighbors and from news reports of several instances in which the 9-1-1 system has failed persons in need of emergency assistance. Some instances of concern have occurred within our Single Member Districts of ANC 6B. Most recently, a crime victim's calls to 9-1-1 and those of other witnesses to the incident went unanswered. It was revealed that this particular victim had the same experience of unanswered calls to 9-1-1 as she was hiding from an active shooter in the Potomac Avenue Metro Station on February 1st. In her written complaints about the 9-1-1 system to the Mayor's Office, Council members, and the Office of Unified Communications, she highlighted the fact that she hung up with 9-1-1 because she was placed on hold, and 9-1-1 called her back, only to again place her on hold. The call back itself could have revealed her location to the active shooter had her ringer not been silenced. This dangerous aspect of the system could endanger any future victims in similar circumstances, especially, as this victim pointed out in her reports, victims of domestic/relationship violence.

On March 29, 2023, Acting Director Heather McGaffin advised Council Member Brooke Pinto and the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety about improvements in staffing, training and accountability that the Office of Unified Communications have made since the audit of the office in 2021. Despite the assurances of the Acting Director about these improvements, it seems clear by the delays suffered by multiple victim callers, that the center continues to fall short of meeting the national standard outlined in the 2021 audit of calls answered within 15 seconds. Further, despite enhanced training and accountability, mistakes made in dispatch of emergency services, and problems with locating victim callers have continued.

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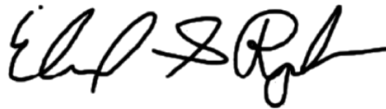
SMD 09 Matt LaFortune

We are also aware and applaud Councilmember Brooke Pinto for her proposed legislation concerning increased transparency at the Office of Unified Communications (9-1-1 / 3-1-1 call center). This is important legislation and is a welcome step in improving notice and transparency to the public of the Office of Unified Communications' activities. However, we feel more action is necessary to ensure that this Office is meeting, or better, exceeding national standards in its response to persons in need of emergency assistance within the District of Columbia.

The importance of our city's 9-1-1 system to the safety and security of all residents and visitors cannot be overstated. It is the service that citizens use when they are suffering the most terrible circumstances and have the most desperate need. It is one service in which satisfactory performance is inadequate. Citizens of the city should be able to expect the highest standards from our 9-1-1 call center in its response and have unwavering confidence in its performance. It is the cornerstone of all the city's emergency services, which cannot properly respond and perform without impeccable performance from this essential service.

We believe that it is the responsibility of the Mayor and our City Council to provide proper oversight of this essential service. We urge that the City Council create a task force or subcommittee under the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety to investigate failures of the Office of Unified Communications' 9-1-1 operations and take action to ensure the executive branch of the District of Columbia ensures adequate, well-trained staffing of the 9-1-1 call center and that it implements policies and procedures to prevent any future failures.

Sincerely,



Edward Ryder
Chair, ANC 6B